





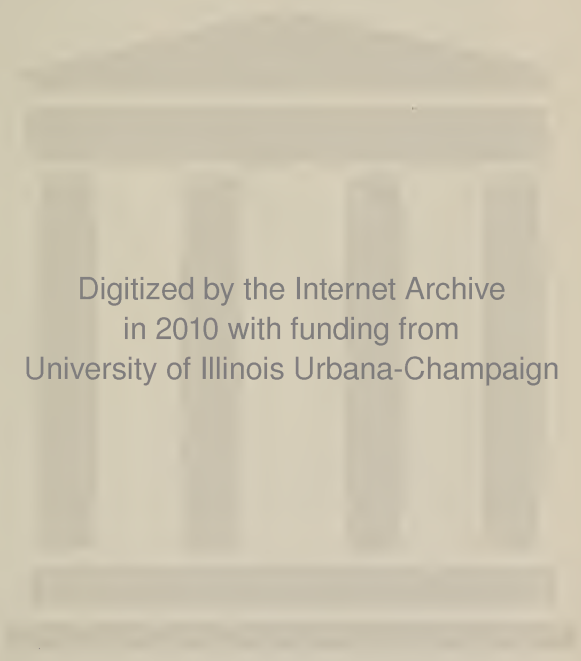
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# MARY BROWNE

BY

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# MARY BROWNE.

## CHAPTER I.

‘MARY,’ said my mother, ‘it’s no use talking, you must go to school.’

We had been arguing the point so long that I was no less tired of the subject than she was herself, though my face was scarcely as pale and careworn as hers, and the natural carelessness of youth prevented my really feeling as strongly on the subject under discussion as I wished her to believe I did. ‘After all,’ I thought, ‘it will be a change.’ Girls dislike monotony—and accordingly I disliked the life I was then leading.


My father had been dead two months. I was old enough to feel the loss deeply, and to

understand that in consequence of it my own life had not much present promise of happiness ; but I was, unfortunately, too listless to realise fully how necessary it was that no time should be lost in preparing me for my future profession—that of a governess.

‘ You see,’ said my mother, after a pause, during which she had been looking at me with an indescribable expression of pity and love on her face—‘ You see, Mary, that if you and Louis are well placed, I can give up housekeeping, and may be doing something myself, at once, to make the little money we have go farther. We may even become independent in time, and able to manage entirely without your uncle’s assistance.’

‘ Yes,’ I said, in a tone of indifference, for though I had resolved to give in and go to school, I nevertheless felt an uncomfortable determination to do it in as unamiable a manner as possible—‘ Yes, I understand. When do you want me to go ?’

She made no answer ; but rose, and left



the room, evidently contented that I had acceded to her wishes, however ungraciously ; and probably thinking it better, for the moment, not to go into detail. I watched her out, and then, turning to the fire, hid my face in my hands, and sat thinking.

Not pleasant thoughts, certainly, for a girl of fifteen ! The predominant idea with me was, that, all things considered, I surely possessed but a small allowance of that quality which is commonly designated ‘feeling.’ From a petted, spoiled child, the idol of my father, flattered by everyone, I had become suddenly changed into a woman, with the necessity for work before me, and a great disinclination to do it ; and yet, as an usual thing, I did not feel affected or depressed by these circumstances in the least. I felt angry sometimes, but that soon passed off. ‘Perhaps,’ I said to myself, ‘the suddenness of it all has, as it were, taken my breath away—or, rather, stupefied me—and I shall feel it afterwards.’ I certainly *did* feel it

afterwards, though not precisely in the way I had imagined I should.

In the midst of my cogitations the door opened, and my brother entered. He was one year older than myself, and ten years more self-reliant.

I raised my head quickly, dreading his ridicule of my serious mood. He came up to the fire-place with his hands in his pockets, which latter, as he advanced, he turned gradually inside out, without, however, dropping anything, for there was nothing to drop. There was something so ludicrous in his face as he went through this performance, that I laughed in spite of myself.

‘Ah!’ he said, joining loudly in my mirth, ‘you may well laugh. Pick up all I’ve dropped, and make your fortune out of it, if you can. That’s the state of my finances. Mary,’ he added, looking suddenly serious, ‘have you any money?’

‘Why?’ I asked, guardedly.

‘Because if you have, I shall be under the



painful necessity of asking you to lend it to me.'

He spoke so coolly, and so much as if he considered it already his own, that I had scarcely courage to ask him what he wanted it for.

'Want it for? Why, to spend, of course. What a ridiculous question!'

'Come with me,' I said, 'and I'll give you what I have.'

He followed me upstairs into my little bedroom. I opened a drawer, and took from it a small mother-of-pearl box, which my father had given me on some long-past birthday. I unlocked it, and told him to take what he wanted. It contained a piece of gold and some silver. His eyes glistened.

'Do you mean what you say?'

'Certainly. What does it matter? What does anything matter?'

He waited a moment, and then very quietly possessed himself of the whole of its contents.

‘Stay!’ I exclaimed; ‘you are welcome to the rest, but leave me that.’

I took from his hand a florin with a peculiar mark upon it. It was my own profile, minute, but still recognisable, which had been cut neatly in the silver by an old school-fellow of my brother’s, who, about a year previously, had sailed for India in a ship which had never since been heard of.

‘Nonsense,’ he said, snatching it back. ‘I want that particularly.’

‘What! to spend?’ I exclaimed, trying in vain to unclasp his hand. ‘Poor Harry did it, you know, and I promised I’d never part with it.’

‘Well, if it’s taken from you by force, you don’t part with it. It parts with you, though, like you, it can’t help itself. *Necessitas non habet leges*, nor affection either, nor constancy, nor anything of the sort.’

He looked at me defiantly. I don’t know what induced me to part with my treasure so

easily, but I made no further resistance though my eyes filled with tears.

‘I’m glad you’re getting so sensible,’ he went on ; ‘you’re a good little thing, at heart, I do believe ; only, you see, I must have money. It’s such a deuced hard thing for a fellow to have to go about without any cash in his pocket. *I* can’t do it—that’s a fact.’

He stood looking at me while I locked and put away the empty box, and then, shrugging his shoulders, walked out of the room. I followed him downstairs. He took his hat from a peg in the hall, and again stood looking at me as he put it on.

‘What are you staring at ?’ I asked, returning his glance.

‘I don’t know, I’m sure,’ he answered slowly ; ‘it’s not at your beauty, for you haven’t got any. I really can’t account for the fascination of the moment, unless it’s that you look so amiable. There, Mary, be friends and say “good-bye.”’

‘What do you mean by “good-bye”?’ I said. ‘Won’t you be home to dinner?’

‘What dinner is there, my dear? Bread and cheese, I suppose, and the contents of some of the bottles in the surgery to wash it down, if we decide upon indulging our natural antipathy to water as a beverage. No! I think I may safely say I shall *not* be home to dinner. At all events, good-bye, in case you’ve retired to your chamber when I do turn up.’

I made no answer. He stooped and kissed me. I opened the hall-door for him, and watched him as he went down the road, with his hat on one side, and his hands in his pockets—never once looking back. I watched him as he went down the road—went quietly from his mother and sister never to return to them again.

## CHAPTER II.

I WAS on my road to school. The separation from my mother had roused in my heart the passionate grief which the death of my father and the disappearance of my brother had failed to call forth, and alone in the railway carriage I wept bitterly. At length I realised my position, and felt it with the acuteness always attendant upon the first real agony of life. I had no idea of struggling with my fate, no thought of striving to turn what seemed to me a curse into a blessing; the predominant feelings in my breast were an unreasoning, savage hatred of my destiny, and a growing bitterness towards my brother, as the only human being I could accuse of being in any way responsible for any of my present unhappiness. The rest God had

sent, and I dared not openly rebel against it, but his desertion (in my anger I could call it by no other name) was his own act and deed, committed in utter aggravation of my misery. The recollection of the quiet way in which my mother had taken it, only served to augment my grief and passion. A week after my brother's departure she had received a letter from him, stating, in the most concise manner, that by the time she received it he should be on his way to Australia; that he considered that under the circumstances we should agree with him that he had acted for the best, and that in the event of his succeeding in what he intended to undertake, we should hear from him again. This satisfied her. Her son was alive and comparatively safe, and in her joy at knowing this, the utter heartlessness of the writer did not seem to affect her in any way. Sitting in that carriage and pondering over it all, I began to hate him so, that the intensity of my own feelings seemed to frighten me—till at length I resolutely

turned my thoughts away from him to the contemplation of my future life, of which I as yet knew little or nothing.

I was going to a ladies' college, situated at the north side of London—that was all I comprehended of it. I began picturing to myself its details—wondering what the new faces would be like, and whether I should soon get accustomed to them. Wondering if I should meet, in my unknown home, any girls of my own age as utterly lonely and hopeless as myself. Wondering if the time to come would always find me as careless of existence as at present. And so, wondering and thinking, my eyes unconsciously closed, and all my troubles were forgotten in a sound sleep.

I was awakened by the sudden jerk of the train stopping—then came the shouts of the porters and the noisy confusion of the passengers. My journey was at an end. For the first time in my life I was in the great City of London. I had received from



my mother a few plain and simple directions as to the completion of my journey, but for the moment I was too bewildered to recollect them. I stepped from the carriage, and began to look round, but soon found there was no time for that. I was pushed about to such an extent, that after a few ineffectual struggles to look after my luggage, as I had been told to do, I decided upon moving out of the crowd, and waiting till the way should be clearer for accomplishing my object. As I stood watching the living mass moving to and fro, a porter came up to me and roughly enquired my name. Not guessing his intention, I turned from him with as much contempt in my face as it was capable of expressing.

‘Well, Miss,’ he retorted, ‘if you feel it against your conscience to answer me, I can’t see to your luggage, that’s all.’ So saying, my would-be friend disappeared.

I waited, disconsolately enough, till the platform was nearly empty, when another



member of the fraternity approached, and pointing to my poor little trunks, nearly the last remaining unclaimed, enquired in a gruff tone 'if them there was my boxes?'

Wiser this time, I signified that 'them there *was* my boxes.'

'Cab?' he remarked, interrogatively.

I again made a sign of assent, and in a moment was following him, and a truck, and my boxes down the platform.

We stopped at a cab-stand. My conductor placed my belongings on the top of one of the vehicles, and himself at the door, and then, putting his hand in at the window, unblushingly demanded half-a-crown.

'What for?' I ventured to ask.

'What for? Why—for—carrying—them—there—boxes.' He emphasised, and stopped between each word in a way that made my inexperienced blood run cold.

'I—I stammered—'I have nothing but a half-sovereign.'

‘That will do,’ he said; ‘if you give it to me, I’ll get change.’

As I handed it to him, he asked where I wanted to go, then, reporting my answer to the cabman, disappeared, and the horse started off immediately. In a moment I understood it all. I pulled the check-string violently to attract the driver’s attention, but could not succeed in doing so. My only alternative was to put my head out of window, and call as loudly as I dared. In rising to do so I did not observe that the window was closed. My head went through it, instead of out of it, accompanied by a loud crash, a stream of blood down my face, and the effectual stopping of the cab. I scarcely knew what had happened when the owner of the unfortunate window made his appearance, staring at me through the broken glass.

‘My head went through it,’ I said, not waiting to be questioned, ‘but I’ll pay you for it, I will indeed, if you’ll only get me back my half-sovereign.’

It's highly probable he thought I was mad. At all events, he looked as if he thought it.

‘He's stolen my half-sovereign,’ I went on, heedless of the opinion of his face. ‘He's stolen it—the porter who carried my luggage. I gave it to him to get change—go after him, and find him.’

He looked at me doubtfully for a moment, gave a prolonged low whistle, mounted his box, drove back into the station, and then re-appeared at the cab-door.

‘Now, Miss, you'd better go with me and find him—I'll get a mate to mind the horse.’

I looked blank.

‘I s'pose you'd know him, when you see him again?’

‘No!’ I replied, in despair, ‘I shouldn't know him a bit. He kept his cap over his face. I don't know what he was like. I scarcely looked at him.’

‘Well then,’ he continued, in an impressive tone, ‘you'll never get your money back. Haven't you got any more?’

‘Only a little,’ I said, ‘but I can get some where I’m going.’

‘Oh! if that’s the case, I’d better drive on. You see, if you don’t know the man, he’s not likely to come for’ard and say he did it.’

This was indisputable ; so with a sad heart, I again entered the cab, and my philosophic companion started on our journey for the second time.

My reflections were anything but pleasant. The first thing I should have to do upon entering my new home would be to borrow money. I had but two or three shillings left. My poor mother having had little to spare when she parted with me, had promised to send me a fresh supply in a short time, telling me that I should have no need of much at first. Alas! we had neither of us thought of such a contingency as the present! I put my handkerchief to my still bleeding head, and cried quietly till the cab stopped, then, hastily wiping away all traces of emotion, I alighted, and running up the steps of the house before

me, knocked at the door. It was opened, almost immediately, by a neat-looking housemaid.

‘Can I see Miss Grimshaw?’ I enquired.

She answered my question in American style, by asking another.

‘Are you a new young lady, Miss?’

‘Yes,’ I replied.

‘Come inside, if you please. If you give me the money, I will pay the cabman for you, and then look after your boxes.’

‘I must see Miss Grimshaw,’ I said; ‘I have met with an accident, and have not sufficient money.’

She opened her eyes so wide that they looked as if they would never come right again.

‘You can’t see her, Miss. She never sees any of the young ladies after prayers, except she sends for them herself; and she never breaks through the rules.’

‘Oh! pray ask her to see *me*,’ I exclaimed.

‘I don’t know what to do! I *must* see her.’

She hesitated. I saw my advantage and pressed it.

‘Well, I’ll go and ask her, Miss ; but I’m sure to get into trouble. She won’t be pleased, I know.’

She was some time gone, and I had leisure to look about, but I was too much occupied by unpleasant thoughts to take advantage of the privilege. She returned at last. ‘Miss Grimshaw will see you for a moment, Miss. Please walk this way.’

She turned and said something in a low tone to the cabman, then closing the door, preceded me up a wide staircase. In a few moments I was in the presence of the Lady Principal of Victoria College.

It was a large brilliantly-lighted room. Coming as I did from the dim street and a dim staircase, this brilliantly-lighted room had the effect of blinding me. I had drawn my veil over my face to hide any tear or blood-stains that might still disfigure it, and fearing to lift it, stood blinking my eyes at some

object that was moving across the room towards me. I had just enough wit left to conclude that this object must be Miss Grimshaw. I did not see this woman—as we usually see people—suddenly and distinctly. If I may use the expression, she gradually dawned upon me. As my eyes became accustomed to the strong light, her figure grew, by degrees, more palpable and tangible, till she stood out before me, a bold, tall woman, with a contracted, freezing look. She struck me immediately, I remember, as being what I should then have called, ‘put together in unequal quantities.’ Small eyes and a large mouth. Low forehead and a large head. Thin cheeks and a prominent nose. Unnaturally small waist and a naturally long body. Still she had the appearance of a lady. That I saw at a glance.

‘Miss Browne, I presume?’

The tone was so in keeping with the stern expression of the face, that I started, and produced my ‘Yes’ in a trembling voice.



‘Lift your veil, if you please, when you address me.’

Her keen eyes seemed to pierce me through and through.

‘I—I—I,’ I stammered, obeying her command, and displaying my face—‘I met with an accident. I put my head through the window of the cab.’

‘Miss Browne!’

The amount of astonishment she managed to concentrate in these two words went far to frighten away the little sense I had left.

‘I couldn’t help it,’ I went on, rallying, I scarcely knew how. ‘I gave the porter a half-sovereign to change for me, and he never brought it back, and in trying to stop the cabman to go after him, I put my head through the cab window.’

‘Miss Browne!’

‘The cabman is not gone,’ I continued, in sheer desperation. ‘I have not enough left to pay for the cab, and nothing for the window. He is waiting at the door.’



‘Miss Browne!!’

I hung my head, and stood still, trembling. She turned from me in silence, walked across the room, and rang the bell. A servant appeared.

‘Request Miss Thomson to come to me for a moment.’

In about two minutes a lady, still young, entered. She was dressed in deep mourning, and was quiet and gentle-looking.

‘Miss Thomson,’ said Miss Grimshaw, ‘this is the young person respecting whom I spoke to you this morning. Have the goodness to attend to her. You can go with that lady, Miss Browne.’

Miss Thomson made a comprehensive bow which took in both of us, and then walked out of the room, I following in silence.

When she arrived at the top of the first flight of stairs, out of sight and hearing of everyone but ourselves, this lady suddenly turned round, took my hands in hers, and kissed me on both my cheeks. The tears again started to my eyes.

‘Don’t cry,’ she said softly; ‘you will be happier soon, when you have been here a little while and know some of us. You’ll soon get used to it.’

I clung to her, still crying, but as grateful to her at that moment for the sympathy that she showed as I still am and always shall be. We seldom spoke after that night, for our duties lay apart, but the memory of the first kind words addressed to me in that house, and the fond memory of the one who uttered them, will always rest with me.

‘We must not stop here,’ she continued, stroking my face caressingly. ‘I must go to the study and say “good-night” to those noisy girls. Do you hear them? You had better come with me, and you can then go to bed too. Will you do so?’

I assented, drying my eyes, and putting my hand in hers as though I had found a friend.

We went up another flight of stairs and through several long passages. At length

my guide stopped, opened a door, and entered a room, still leading me by the hand.

The inmates of this room had evidently, a moment before, been in a state of wild tumult and confusion. Now, there was a dead silence ; and, as if by common consent, hundreds of staring eyes were fixed on me. I say 'hundreds,' for the apartment contained at least two hundred occupants. Unused to such close scrutiny, I felt it painfully.

My conductor led me into the middle of the room, and taking a whistle from her waist, sounded it sharply. Half the eyes were transferred from me to herself immediately, the rest remained true to their first idea.

'Young ladies,' said the owner of the whistle, 'I introduce a new companion to you —Miss Browne.'

A suppressed 'Oh!' came from the background, and one voice in the distance uttered a sarcastic 'Oh! de-ar!' A few of the girls

nearest to me came forward and shook hands, but the majority evidently looked upon me in the light of an intruder, whom they were not bound even to tolerate, and would certainly not be familiar with, on any account. In a short time my new companions found the use of their voices, as well as their eyes, and a buzzing sound, such as can only be produced by a large number of people talking together in an undertone, ran along the room. It was not difficult for me to perceive that I was the honoured subject of comment. But my torture did not last long. The whistle was again heard, producing a dead silence ; and this time all eyes were turned on the whistler.

‘ Good-night to you all,’ said that lady.

A loud ‘ good-night ’ was returned ; and in an incredibly short space of time, the room was cleared of everyone but myself and Miss Thomson.

‘ Now, let me see,’ said that lady, after looking at me and reflecting. ‘ I think I must

put you into Miss Launceston's room. Are you ready to go to bed ?'

'Yes, quite,' I answered.

'Well, come with me.'

I again followed her ; this time into a large bedroom containing a number of small iron bedsteads, and occupants in proportion.

My presence seemed to have the same effect on this fraction as it had had on the whole body. Every eye was fixed on me—though, not having heard any sound as I ascended, I concluded that the tongues had been previously silenced by some potent cause, independent of the whistler, to me unknown.

'Miss Browne is to sleep in Bed No. 6,' said my conductress to a tall girl standing in the middle of the room. 'She is come to take Annie Gray's place. There, that's the bed, dear,' she added, turning to me, and signifying its precise position by a motion of her hand ; 'good-night.'

'Good-night,' I said ; and she left the

room without any further display of the sympathy she had expressed for me in the earlier part of the evening. I walked to the bed she had pointed out, and sat down upon it, still with the same battery of eyes fixed upon me.

‘Miss Browne,’ said the tall girl, intensifying her own particular glance, as a sign that she was looking at me now from some other inducement than that afforded by the mere vulgar curiosity which everyone in the room shared—‘Miss Browne, you are come, Miss Thomson says, to take Miss Gray’s place. The first bell will ring at half-past five. You must be down by six, and hear four of the little ones practise before eight, half-an-hour each. That one will be the first,’ pointing to a small being about seven years old; ‘she’ll show you the music-lobbies in the morning. Good-night. You mustn’t talk in the bedroom.’

‘Thank you. Good-night,’ I replied.

All was silent again, but still the staring

battery. No one spoke, but I knew intuitively that not an action of mine escaped the observation of one of them ; and that at the first opportunity they would repay themselves for their present silence by discussing me unmercifully. A sharp school-girl is only another name for an incipient quiz of the first order, and nothing is so dreaded by one—even the sharpest—as the opinion of her companions : so, although newly-fledged, I sat looking round, sensible enough to be painfully conscious of my unpleasant situation. But not for long. I had not been three minutes in my uncomfortable position, before my attention was so forcibly and irresistibly attracted, that I instantaneously forgot everything but the object I was looking at.

I have said that all the eyes in the room were fixed upon me, but I was wrong. There was some one seated on a bed in the distance who never, to my knowledge, looked at me once. She had not commenced preparing for rest, but was half-sitting, half-re-



clining on the bed with a book in her hands, on which her eyes were intently fixed. There was something so unusual-looking about her, something so utterly unlike anything I had ever before seen or imagined, that I felt certain at the moment, and feel as certain now, that had I met her casually in the street instead of having the opportunity of observing her which I then had, I should none the less have been struck by her individuality, I should none the less have been impressed with a constant and vivid remembrance of her. As she sat there with her face in perfect repose, she might have been fifteen years of age, or she might have been five-and-twenty, for any information on the subject you could gather from the face itself. Its youthful look had such a cast of thought about it, such an earnest expression of intelligence and power. The features of this face were as singular as the character stamped upon it, yet very beautiful. The forehead was broad and bold and massive, with the



hair thrown loosely back from it. This hair was thick and dark, and clustered round the shoulders in a profusion of waves and curls. When I turned from the hair and glanced again at the forehead, this forehead seemed to me to have such a look of power, that it actually impressed me with a vague feeling of awe. It gave me the idea, in some way, that I was a poor ignorant, stupid creature, with no sense at all. There was none of the soft, sweet indecision of girlhood about it. With it, I think, it would have lost its force and pride. The eyes I could not see, but their lashes were dark, like the hair, and so long as almost to rest upon the cheek. The nose was straight, the nostrils thin and delicate. The mouth was partly open, showing a set of teeth, small and even, and of a pure dead whiteness. But I forgot the teeth altogether in looking at the mouth. It startled me by its entire contrast with every other portion of the face. The lips were full and red, and had a doubting, irresolute expression, alto-

gether out of keeping with the other features. I thought they gave a wavering undecided look to the whole face, and then thought they would have done so, if the bold chin had not come to the rescue. I thought they spoilt it entirely, and then decided they would have done so if they had not had the effect of toning it down from a certain masculine sternness (which it would certainly have otherwise possessed) to an expression of gentleness and weakness never seen but on the countenance of a woman. This strange face was flushed slightly—probably from the excitement of reading—but otherwise perfectly calm and at rest. Though I watched it but for a few moments, it remains so distinctly in my memory as I saw it then for the first time, that in describing it now I seem to be merely tracing over with a pen some vivid, startling likeness of it. I forgot the scrutiny I myself was being subjected to in looking at it then. I almost forget my present occupation and everything around me in thinking of it now.

The figure belonging to this face was, as far as I could judge from its position, tall and full, and was attired in black like myself. There was a careless sort of grace about it, a natural beauty which no art can give. It seemed to me as if it had been made to suit the lips, and not the rest of the face. There was an air of *nonchalance* too about the style of dress which helped to give me this idea. The more I looked at this strange girl, the more she impressed me with a restless feeling of curiosity, mixed with a vague fear that she was too far removed from me by some rare mental power, for me ever to understand or know her. It was not till some one spoke that I roused myself from my temporary trance. The words were addressed to the object of my observation. I heard them, though the speaker whispered—

‘Put away your book, dear ; the gas will be out in a minute.’

This was repeated twice, but still no sign nor movement from the drooping figure. It

was not till the speaker placed her hand over the open page of the book, that she whom she was addressing paid the least attention. Then—a sudden start—and the dark eyes appeared like a flash of light. If the forehead had not prepared me for them, I should have wondered at their quick eager expression, and wild, lustrous beauty. She was about to speak—angrily, I think, but the other, a small child with a fair face, pressed her fingers playfully on the full lips. Then she checked herself, half-laughing, and after kissing her little friend, began, in a hurried, careless way, to prepare for rest. As she did so most of the others in the room knelt down to their prayers. In lieu of this she resumed her book as quickly as possible, reading even more attentively, if possible, than before. I still watched her intently. She, on her part, did not honour me with a glance. I don't think she even knew I was present. I was wondering if this was the case, when suddenly the gas was extinguished, leaving

us all in nearly total darkness. I almost fancied I could see her gleaming eyes shining through it. Shaking off the fascination, I hurried into bed, and after several hours of restless tossing, dreamed strange, troubled dreams of home and happiness.

## CHAPTER III.

LISTENING to, or perusing, a minute account of the daily occupations of an ordinary life is not an interesting employment. Feeling this, I will be as brief as possible in describing my first day at Victoria College; which I should not do at all, only I wish to present the reader with a sample of the life led nowadays by hundreds of young girls who have the misfortune to be what are called 'articled' or 'governess-pupils' in a ladies' boarding-school. The day I am about to describe was the first of many hundreds, so much like each other in their main points that, looking back on them now, through a long vista of years, I cannot pick out a dozen which any unusual

event distinguished from its immediate predecessors. But to describe this particular day.

As I was told would be the case, I was roused at half-past five by the loud ringing of a bell. I arose immediately, according to the orders of the previous night—descending at six precisely with my first little musical victim to a small music-room, where the tiny creature ‘practised’ for one half-hour under my *surveillance*, and was then succeeded, separately, by three others, who went through the same improving process. This filled up the time till eight o’clock, when the before-mentioned bell was heard to ring again. At the suggestion of my latest-arrived little friend, as the last sound died away, I accompanied her to another wing of the house, where we joined a long stream of girls entering the room in which, on the previous evening, I had made their acquaintance. I will describe this room.

It was (I afterwards heard) seventy-two



feet square. It was carpeted, and had nine curtained windows on each side. A small door, near one of these windows, led to the 'music-lobbies,' as they were termed. At one end of the room, at right angles with the windows, was the principal entrance, resplendent with red baize, and at the other stood a high desk, with a stool in proportion—the scholastic throne of the lady principal, or, in her absence, of Miss Thomson, the head-governess. The space separating this entrance and this throne was covered with cocoa-nut matting, forming what seemed to me to be a kind of gravel-path, bordered on either side by nine tables covered with black leather, their length to the breadth of the room, a table to every window, and a row of chairs on each side of each table. This was the 'study,' not the 'school-room.' Schools have 'school-rooms' and 'quarters.' Colleges have 'studies' and 'terms;' the reason being that the latter sound well, and 'pay' infinitely better. There is more in the judi-



cious employment of words than thoughtless people imagine.

I was nearly the last to enter this study, and perhaps quite the last to catch a glimpse of Miss Grimshaw, seated in state at the before-mentioned desk, holding an open Bible with both her hands, almost as if she were in the act of throwing it from her. From this book, when each young lady had taken her place, she read a chapter, in a denunciatory, not to say threatening tone, and then repeated the Lord's Prayer in a harsh voice, all present, as far as I could judge, uniting audibly. When this ceremony was over, everyone rose and stood in silence for a moment, then Miss Grimshaw called out in a loud tone,

‘Number one.’

‘Twelve,’ replied a voice.

‘Number two.’

‘Twenty-four,’ was the response.

And so on, twelve being added to each number, till a voice at my table replied,

‘Seventy-one.’ This was productive of a dead pause.

I understood by this time that this process was a kind of muster-roll to ascertain if anyone who ought to be present was absent. The pause was broken by Miss Grimshaw.

‘Who is missing in number six?’

‘Miss Launceston,’ said the voice at my side.

‘Where is Miss Launceston?’

‘She was reading, and not dressed when the bell rang.’

‘What was she reading?’

‘Shakespeare, I believe, Miss Grimshaw.’

‘Fined on the Minor Penal list.’

This was Greek to me as yet, but I soon learned the meaning of it. I listened attentively while the remainder of the numbers were called out. No further failure. When all was over, the occupants of the room formed themselves quickly and neatly into single file, and walked round the apartment three times to the sound of a march played

on a piano, and by a pianiste, both invisible, at least to me. I had been placed in the rank by a friendly hand, and soon found myself in a large dining-room, where the fact of each young girl falling into her place without the slightest confusion explained to me the meaning of the march. This dining room, I was told afterwards, was one hundred and fifty feet long. It contained eight tables, each capable of accommodating about thirty persons. The breakfast consisted of bread with a thin network of butter, and pale, nominal coffee, both unlimited in quantity. At the expiration of a half-hour's silence and eating, another bell was sounded, and the room was vacated in the same order as it had been entered. As I went out, I received a direction from Miss Thomson, who stood at the entrance of the room waiting to bring up the rear of the procession, to repair again to my music-room, where four other half-hours were passed in the same occupation as before—a bell ringing at the

expiration of each, to dismiss one pupil and summon another. This bell, I gathered later on, was sounded every half-hour during study time—no single occupation being continued by any pupil longer than that period. Though many, like myself, had to rise at half-past five—the majority of the girls did not leave their beds till seven—the real business of the day, except for the governess-pupils and their early victims—always very young children, by the way—commencing with the prayers at eight o'clock.

When my second four half-hours were expired, I again joined my companions for five minutes, for luncheon in the dining-room. This time there was no procession. It was one tumultuous rush; the small rolls of dry bread being handed to us on trays, and eagerly snatched and devoured by the recipients. The noise was deafening. It was the only time of real, unchecked liberty allowed in the day. When it was ended, I re-commenced my duties, this time on my

own account. First, a history class with one of the governesses ; then a French class with a master ; then a grammar class with Miss Grimshaw. It was now half-past twelve, and till three o'clock I was again engaged in teaching in my music-room. (These hours, however—from half-past twelve till three—were not always occupied entirely in this way, one of them being devoted to walking exercise, on three days of each week.) When I left my sanctum, the procession for dinner was over, and I entered the dining-room with my last pupil, in company with several other young people of my class and their last pupils, after grace had been said, and while the meat was being served. This meal lasted till a few minutes before four o'clock. I then returned to my music-room and its duties till six, when the bell rang for tea, which with the preliminary march occupied us till seven.

‘Now,’ I thought, ‘my day is ended ;’ but I was wrong. As I left the dining-room,

I was directed by Miss Thomson, who was again waiting at the entrance, to repair once more to my—by this time hated—music-room, and practise my own music till the prayer-bell rang.

‘May I not write home?’ I enquired, desperately.

‘Oh no, dear! No one may write oftener than once a fortnight; and, unfortunately, yesterday was the letter-day. Besides, all the governesses and governess-pupils are obliged to practise from tea-time till prayers. Pass on, dear, you are stopping the others going out.’

With tearful eyes, I obeyed orders. At half-past eight we again assembled in the study. Miss Grimshaw held the same Bible in the same position, and went through the same formula as in the morning. She then pronounced a solemn ‘Good-night,’ paraded down the gravel-path, and disappeared on the other side of the red baize. A breeze sprang up immediately—the quick, eager

rush of voices surging through the room like wind. A sudden whistle, by the whistler of the previous evening, followed by a dead silence. Then the whistler's voice sounded through the apartment.

‘Miss Launceston, Miss Harrop, and Miss Browne—the young lady who came yesterday, I mean—Miss Grimshaw wishes to speak to each of you, separately; please to remain here. The others can go.’

Another whistle, and, with a loud ‘Good-night,’ in which the gentle whistler's voice was quite drowned, though I saw she was returning the farewell of her young friends, the room was cleared as quickly as it had been on the previous evening, no one remaining but myself and two others. Even the whistler on this occasion disappeared.

I looked at my companions in silence. I looked at them as a stranger looks upon strangers, with no feeling of interest or sympathy; they, at me, as though our want of knowledge of each other was a thing to



which they were too utterly indifferent to wish it to be otherwise. In that moment we were left together, is it possible that some dim foreshadowing of the future loomed before one or all of us? Who shall say? In my memory of it now, it all seems a blank. I know only that we looked at each other in silence.

It was over. Miss Thomson re-entered the room. She turned to one of my companions—

‘You are to go, at once, to Miss Grimshaw.’

I followed the direction of her eyes, and glanced at the person she addressed. I have since felt certain that some strange influence must have been over me during the time we had been left together (though I was insensible to it at the moment, and had no memory of it afterwards), for though I had looked at her distinctly, it had been as though I had not looked. There had been, on my part, no absolute recognition of the



face, though, not long before, I had imagined it to be indelibly impressed upon my memory. It was the same which had so powerfully attracted my attention the previous night in the bedroom.

‘You are to go, at once, to Miss Grimshaw.’

‘Indeed!’ said the young lady she addressed. ‘And for what?’

‘I don’t know, really.’

A curious look of irresolution came over her mouth for a moment. Then she laughed quietly, rose from her seat, and walked slowly from the room with an air of listlessness and indifference that would have edified Miss Grimshaw had she been present. Miss Thomson followed in silence.

I turned hastily to my remaining companion, a pretty inanimate-looking girl of about sixteen, with a slight figure, soft blue eyes, and an abundance of golden hair.

‘Who is that girl?’ I asked, hurriedly.

‘That’s Miss Thomson, the head-go-

verness. She's not a girl, she's an old woman.'

'I don't mean that one,' I said, impatiently; 'I mean the other.'

'What! Marion Launceston?'

'Is that her name?'

'That's the name of the one that isn't Miss Thomson.'

'Who is she?' I asked, impetuously.

'Who is she? Why, she's one of the girls. Who do you suppose she is?'

'I understood now how strange my manner must appear to my evidently very matter-of-fact companion; so, after a short silence, went on in a quieter tone.

'Is she clever?' I said, scarcely knowing what to ask.

'Clever? Yes, she's *clever*, if doing everything you have to do without trying makes people clever; but I don't like her, and never did, with all her cleverness.'

'Why don't you like her?'

'Because I don't. She's a proud, haughty,

conceited creature, and thinks herself better and cleverer than anyone else.'

'Does she say so?'

My new friend evidently took my innocence for satire. She glanced at me doubtfully for an instant, but the expression of my face probably re-assured her.

'Say so? Of course she doesn't *say* so, but she thinks it, and acts it. There isn't a girl in the college that can come anything near up to her, so I suppose she can think what she likes. All *I* know is that I can't bear her, and I'm very glad she is gone out of the room.'

'But *why* can't you bear her?'

'Because I can't. I've told you so once before, and nothing will make me alter; so it's no good arguing.'

I was silent at this, thinking it prudent to save my questions for some one who *could* bear her; but in less than a minute, my companion, true to her woman's nature, volunteered the information which, in her

then peculiar mood, probably no amount of questioning on my part would have succeeded in extracting from her.

‘You see,’ she said, in a milder tone, ‘Marion’s so annoying, and she says such queer things ; it puts me out of all patience. No one understands what she means but herself, and I dare say *she* doesn’t, and yet she keeps on saying them. She may *think* they’re very clever, but they’re *not*. There’s nothing in them—nothing but absolute nonsense.’

I think a question was expected at this point, but I was too guarded to venture one ; and, as I had been wise enough to conclude would be the case, my informant soon resumed her discourse without it.

‘Now, what do you think she said in class to-day ?’

‘I’ve no idea.’

‘Well, you know, it was Mr. Williams’s history class—he’s always got dirty nails—and it was all about the French Revolution,

and murders, and drowning people, and all that sort of thing. *I* don't believe any of it—at least, it's pretty certain they make up a good deal; so you needn't believe more than you like, and with me that's a very small quantity. Well, Mr. Williams—his nails as dirty as usual—was telling us about Robespierre and his wickedness—his *vile* wickedness, you know, and all that kind of stuff, and she very coolly interrupts him in the middle, and tells him she holds quite a different opinion from him!—Opinion, indeed!—and that she believes Robespierre was a very good man at heart, only he made a mistake, or was mistaken, or something of that sort. Now, did you ever hear anything so absurd? Contradicting Mr. Williams, you know—her master that's teaching her—that's read books, you know, and very likely knows people that make them! Now, whatever do you think he did?'

'Who?'

I asked, scarcely able to repress a smile.

‘Why, Mr. Williams. Now, I’ll tell you. Instead of giving her a fine for speaking when she wasn’t spoken to, or sending her out of the class for interfering with and contradicting him, as Miss Grimshaw would have had the sense to do, he looks at her as if he thought she was awfully clever, and then—instead of going on with the class, as he is *paid* to do—he keeps on arguing with her about Robespierre all the rest of the time, and winds up by telling us he wished we were all like her! And off goes her ladyship, so conceited that she could scarcely walk.’

I burst out laughing.

‘Ah!’ said my companion, in a slightly more good-humoured tone, ‘it’s all very well for you to laugh, but you wouldn’t laugh if you knew her, and if she irritated you as she does me. You’ll see more of her in a week, and see if you’ll laugh at her then. Why, it makes me so cross only to *think* of her, that I’m always trying *not* to think of her. What

I've told you is nothing. What do you think she did at the end of last term? Would you like to hear?'

'Very much indeed.'

'Then I'll tell you. Well, you know, old Grimshaw's got a mathematical master—I think that's what she calls him. She's had him ever so long, though no one cares much to learn; only about twenty go in for it in the whole place. Well, at the beginning of last term, when Marion came (I came the term before, you know), she said she'd begin, and she took it as such a matter of course, that I thought I'd let her see I could be as grand as she was, so I said I'd begin too—though I never expected to understand anything about it, and didn't want to, for of all the stupid things in the world it's the stupidest. Have you ever learnt it?'

'Learnt what?'

'Why, mathematics, as they call it.'

'No, never.'



‘ Well, take my advice, and don’t. I’ll just tell you what it is, and if that doesn’t set you against it, nothing will. I’ve not been at it long, but I know all about it, for it’s only the same thing over and over again. You have to make lines the same length, and then you have to prove they’re the same length—as if you couldn’t believe your own eyes. What they call “proving” is only keeping on saying it *must* be so. Then you have to see that the points are the same size, and you prove that in the same way as you proved the length of the lines, that is, by saying that *they are*; and then you have to say that if one’s the same as the other they must be both alike—as if everyone didn’t know that; and when you’ve got to the end you say it backwards, till you leave off where you began, and then you say it’s over. It’s just like “The House that Jack Built”—only not half so interesting. *I* can’t see any sense in it. There *isn’t* any sense in it; it’s perfectly idiotical. You don’t learn anything by it.



I knew before I began that if two lines are the same length they *are* the same length, and that's all I know now. Now, isn't it irritating?'

'Yes,' I said; 'it does seem queer, I must say.'

'Well, to go back to Marion. Mr. Esner, that's the man that teaches it, crammed us with a lot about lines at first—all nonsense, you know, I never remembered a word of it—and then one fine morning he asked us if we'd like to begin the Problems—Euclid, they call it. It's a book, you know, made up by some madman or other, I don't know who. Well, Marion sits next to me, so I touched her to say "No"; but she didn't take the least notice—she can be very rude when she likes. So she told him she'd do it, and the next day she set to work. I never, in my whole life, saw anyone go on in the ridiculous way she did for the next week. It was nothing but those lines and Euclid. She was at it every half-hour she could get, from

morning till night, and she never noticed anyone who dared to tell her she would try her eyes; she only turned her lip up when I warned her if she didn't take care they'd drop out on the carpet. In fact, she treated everybody with contempt. She wouldn't leave it. She's dreadfully obstinate, you know; you can see it in her eyes. Did you notice them?'

'I thought them very beautiful.'

'Did you? There's more obstinacy than beauty in them, in my opinion; but, however, that's not to the point. Well, she kept at it without minding anyone but her own evil temper, in the most determined way; and the next class, she went into such raptures about it with Mr. Esner that no one could get in a word. Old Esner is just such another ape as Mr. Williams—only his nails are usually clean—so he stared at her all the time she was talking as if he thought she was perfectly wonderful. She said the stupidest things I ever heard. That it was "so satis-

fying she couldn't leave it!" Did you ever hear anything so ridiculous? I always thought when people were satisfied they, as a rule, *did* leave things; but, of course, I'm nobody, and know nothing. I'm sure of one thing though, and that is, that a precious little of it satisfied me, and when I got to that point I didn't want any more of it. She said that "for once in her life she'd found something she couldn't quarrel with" (very lucky too, I thought, for she agrees with nobody; not talking much, you know, but treating everyone in a half sneering way, which shows she's quarrelling at heart)—"something," she said, "that conquered and calmed her down in spite of herself." I've seen her pretty far gone, but I've never seen her in the silly, excited state she was that day. Old Esner told her she was a "born mathematician," or something of the sort, and wound up by inviting her to his house, where lots of these creatures meet; but Grim wouldn't let her go, though it's all proper,

you know, and his wife, poor thing ! makes tea for them.'

Here my informant stopped to take breath.

'But why wouldn't she let her go?'

She opened her eyes so wide that they really looked as if they would never come to again.

'Why! Well, that's your ignorance! You won't ask such questions when you've been here a week. Why, if the man had had fifty wives she wouldn't have gone! No!' said my companion, with a power of concentration in her speech, and an emphasis in her voice and manner, of which I had certainly not imagined her capable—'No! not if he had had fifty wives, with fifty grown-up sons with fifty thousand wives each, would Miss Grimshaw have let Marion Launceston, or any other Marion go!'

'Possibly not, under those circumstances,' I remarked. 'Such a state of things would be rather more likely, I should imagine, to

increase than to lessen Miss Grimshaw's objection to her going. But I can't understand why she should object at all.'

'Never mind,' said my companion, drawing in her breath in a cold, hard way, as though to say it was no use arguing with *me* — 'Never mind. You'll learn soon enough. This is only your first night. Wait till you've been here a week, and then, if you still want to know why she didn't go, ask me again—not that he'd be any great catch, if he hadn't got a wife already to ill-treat. And ill-treat her he does. They say he makes her say six problems on her knees every night before she goes to bed.'

'What! His wife?' I asked in surprise.

'Yes; and if she makes a mistake he cuts a bit of her hair off. I don't know if it's true, but her hair's awfully short sometimes—especially now; so I suppose he's been at it lately.'

I was so stupid, that till I had taken time

to consider, I really partly believed this nonsense.

‘Well, to go on with my story,’ continued my companion, not heeding my looks of astonishment. ‘She—Marion, you know—knew such a lot of this stuff by the end of last term, when she’d been at it nearly four months, that old Esner said it was *extraordinary*; and one day he made an awfully long speech about it, setting her up as an example to the college, and all that sort of thing. She walked out of the room in the middle of it though, so I suppose for once she was ashamed of herself. Well, at the end of the term, you know, we have an Examination, and hundreds of people come to hear it. Old Grim hunts up all the clergymen she can find—they give it an air, you know—make it important, and all that sort of thing. One came from Australia last time, or the Ojibbeway Islands, or somewhere in that direction—an awful long way, at all events; and they come and examine us in

history, and geography, and lots of things. I suppose they know who to give the most difficult questions to, because those who are clever at anything have their names put on paper and given to these men; and, of course, Marion's was put down first for mathematics—and no wonder, for I know none of the others see any sense in it (except one girl, who's always crying because she wants to understand it and can't), and Marion only pretends to, because she wants to be thought grand and equal to those old fogies. Some of the girls, I fancy, were jealous, and tried to tease her; but she took no more notice of them than if they'd been flies. *I* wasn't jealous. It's not in my nature. I never expect to be first in anything; so couldn't be disappointed. Well, when we were taking our seats for the Examination, I saw old Esner talking very excitedly to some of the clergymen, who were blinking their old eyes, and pricking up their old ears to listen; and I knew it was



about Marion, for they kept turning and staring at her, as if they wished to be certain of recognising her on any future occasion. At last the Examination began, and after the history and arithmetic—I didn't get asked any questions in either, I can tell you—we came to lines and Euclid. The man who examined us was hideous, and had the biggest head I ever saw—I suppose his learning swelled it out. Well, you'll never believe what I'm going to tell you. What do you think it is ?'

'I've no idea.'

'Well, after a few little questions that even I could have answered, only I was not honoured by being asked them, he turns to Marion, and asks her one that took him about half an hour to get through—he made it up, I suppose—it was all about isosceles triangles (Peggy knows what *they* are, I don't), rhomboids, and things of that kind. Now, you'll never guess what she did. When he'd finished (he was pretty well out of



breath, I can tell you) she took no more notice of him than if he'd been a Jack-in-the box. There she stood staring at the wall behind him, like an idiot, as if she hadn't heard a syllable he'd said. Grim gets up at this. "Miss Launceston, are you ill?" "No, I thank you, Miss Grimshaw, I feel perfectly well." "Did you hear the question that Dr. Stick-in-the-mud" (I forget his real name, but that does just as well, you know) — "Did you hear the question that Dr. Stick-in-the-mud asked you?" "Yes, Miss Grimshaw." "Then why don't you answer, Miss Launceston?" She looks at old Grim, and then looks away again, but never says a word. "Perhaps," says the old fellow, "the young lady did not hear the question distinctly" ("Mercy!" I thought, "he's never going through it again!") "Shall I repeat it, Miss Launceston?" (he'd got her name as pat as possible) "shall I repeat it?" "Not on any account," says her ladyship; "I heard every word of it." I really pitied the poor

old creature, he looked so blank and stupid, not knowing what to do ; and everybody seemed so astonished ; Grim's face was a caution, I promise you. At last, I suppose, he thought it best to pass the question on, which he did, I'm thankful to say, without repeating it ; but of course no one knew anything about it. He began at Marion a second time soon after, something shorter than the other, but she did the same thing again ; and this time, not feeling so surprised, we all burst out laughing ; so he left her alone after that, and so did all the other men, not one of them asking her a single question. And I was thoroughly glad of it, for if anything could shame her, I thought, *that* would. I was as glad as I could be. I could have kissed them for it ; I could have kissed and hugged them for it.'

Here my companion stopped, gasping.

'And what did she say ?' I asked.

'Who ? Marion ? Say ! Why, what *could* she say ? She didn't say anything. She

only kept on staring at the wall like a dummy. She never moved a muscle, or showed the least sense of shame. I think she's too hardened to feel ashamed. One of the girls said she saw her half-laughing once, but I don't believe *that*. When it was all over, and we'd begun gathering round to question her, old Grim sends for her to a private interview. She could not even wait till after prayers at night, which is her time for savage interviews, because it breaks through her own rule of not seeing any of us after prayers, and so gets her up to a proper pitch of savageness. She certainly *was* laughing when she came back again, what at I don't know, for she was as disagreeable as usual, and would not answer a single question from anyone—no matter *what* we said—and so the matter ended.'

'But why did she act so?' I asked.

'How do you mean?'

'Why wouldn't she answer the man?'

'How am *I* to know? I haven't the

most remote idea. You'd better ask *her*, and see if she'll answer *you*. I don't suppose she'd any reason for it at all. She's always doing something ridiculous, she's just like an idiot. If I had my way I should—Hush! here she comes.'

She came walking in, in the same listless style she had adopted on walking out, and with the same expression on her face.

'Fanny,' she said, without deigning to look at the person she was addressing, 'it's your turn now. You're to go directly.'

My talkative companion quickly disappeared, and the subject of our previous conversation, without noticing me for a moment, walked across the room to a bookshelf, and began selecting some books. I had expected she would be schoolgirl enough to speak to me, but, finding my mistake, I determined to address her. As she turned to leave the room I spoke.

'Have you any idea,' I said, 'what Miss Grimshaw wants me for?'

She moved round quickly, and looked at me.

‘ You came to-day, did you not ? ’

‘ No, late last evening.’

‘ It’s the same thing.’

She watched me closely for a moment, and then spoke in a tone so opposite from the calm indifference her voice had hitherto expressed, that I scarcely recognised the voice itself.

‘ You seem frightened and unhappy, dear. What’s the matter ? ’

A rush of tears blinded my eyes, but I forced them back. The quick, eager sympathy of her voice and manner brought to my mind with such power the sudden loving memory of a dead voice and a dead past, that that voice and that past seemed born again.

‘ I am not frightened,’ I said, ‘ but I can’t help wondering what she wants me for.’

A natural dislike to exposing my feelings before a stranger, and a fear that if I gave

way to my tearful impulse I should not easily recover my self-control, rendered my voice calm and my manner unconcerned. As I spoke, the old look of listlessness and indifference came back to her face, and its new beauty of tenderness and sympathy died out.

‘Are you a governess-pupil?’ she asked coldly.

‘Yes.’

‘Well,’ she said, a ludicrous expression of amusement coming over her mouth, ‘Miss Grimshaw is going to ask you whether you have any religious impressions; whether you’ve been confirmed; whether you don’t think yourself fortunate in coming to such a temple of learning as Victoria College; whether you do not see clearly the prospect of leading a most interesting and pleasant life within its walls, &c., &c., &c. She’ll then tell you what she “expects from you,” as she calls it. Be prepared to let nothing she may say on this subject surprise you, and

then—well, then, perhaps, it is possible you may *not* be surprised, but that is a question of temperament. *I* should say from your looks that, whatever your preparation may be, you *will* be very *much* surprised. She'll ornament her statement of what she requires at your hands with short texts of Scripture, little bits of hymns, little sighs, little quotations from Hannah Moore and others of her school, and then dismiss you with a blessing, and very likely in a flood of tears.' She laughed gaily as she finished, and was about to speak again, when Fanny Harrop re-appeared, looking defiant.

'You're to go at once,' she said, nodding her head in my direction. 'The Dragon's savage with hunger, and wants to get you out of the way, and get at her supper. I should advise you to run, if you don't want to be eaten yourself.'



## CHAPTER IV.

I WAS comparatively calm the moment before, but as I rose to go I could feel my heart beating rapidly. With no fear of being devoured as warned, but with the feeling that urges us to hurry towards any fate which is as inevitable as distasteful, I almost rushed down the stairs, and, without pausing to hesitate, entered Miss Grimshaw's presence. She was seated at a large table in the centre of the room. She was perfectly erect, with one hand resting on the table, the other in her lap. She seemed to me more unequal and uneven than ever, and I could not resist an absurd impression that came over me that she had seen me in some way through the door as I came downstairs, so immediately were her eyes fixed on me as I opened it.



‘Is it usual to you, Miss Browne, to present yourself before your superiors without previously announcing your intention of doing so? I cannot acknowledge your entrance until it has been effected in the orthodox way.’

I could not help thinking that it had been already acknowledged, but, for a wonder, understanding the meaning of the rather mysterious speech I had been favoured with, I retired to the other side of the door, and knocked faintly.

‘Come in.’

I obeyed. The eyes were still the same, the attitude and manner as repellant.

‘I have sent for you, Miss Browne, to have a short conversation with you respecting your future duties, and the manner in which I wish them to be performed. Come nearer to me, if you please.’

I did so.

‘You must attend closely to what I am about to say, as my manner of speaking is

concise, and I object to repeating that which I have once said. You have been on full duty to-day, I hear. That is as it should be. There is nothing like beginning properly at once, especially as your being here on different terms from most of the other pupils—in fact on sufferance, if not absolutely on charity—leads me to look for thorough work from you; in addition to a most rigid obedience on your part to all my wishes, both expressed and implied. I need hardly, however, have mentioned this to you, as having had a Christian education, you are of course fully aware that “Obedience is the first duty of man, and rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry.” (I have quoted this as she spoke it, as though it were a multiplied text of Scripture.) ‘Do you hear, Miss Browne?’

‘Yes,’ I faltered.

‘Well, I now wish to tell you that in spite of the circumstance upon which I have just remarked, namely, your being received here

on the merely nominal terms on which you *are* received, I do not wish to treat you in any way different from the young ladies, your companions. I always make a point of consulting the feelings of all the dependents in my establishment. Have you ever been confirmed, Miss Browne ?'

'Not yet, Miss Grimshaw.'

'Not yet ! And turned fifteen, I am informed ! What could your father have been thinking of ?'

'Papa,' I broke out passionately, unable to restrain my anger. 'Papa was ill many months before he died. He was good and kind. He always——'

'I must trouble you not to interrupt me, Miss Browne. I am not accustomed to it ; and do not understand it at all.'

Her voice was so decided in spite of the low tone in which she spoke, that as she began to speak I stopped almost involuntarily.

'You have been in the habit of going to church ?'

‘Yes,’ I said.

‘Oh! that’s something. Time and discipline will do much to break up the fallow ground. With respect to your duties. They will always be the same as those you have performed to-day, with very slight, if any, alteration. There is one thing, however, which will fall to your lot, which has not, as yet, been notified to you, and that is the charge of the bedroom in which you sleep, Miss Smith, its present, or rather late governess, proving inefficient. You will have to give the Daily Report you heard that young lady give this morning. You will have to enforce absolute silence among the occupants of that bedroom, which Miss Smith, I regret to state, was totally unable to do. There are other details, connected with this office, of which you will be informed to-morrow by Miss Thomson. These, and all other duties, must be performed in a Christian spirit, and with a manifest desire to please God and myself. Do you hear, Miss Browne?’

‘Yes,’ I answered.

‘Very good. Now, feeling certain that I have given you every needful direction as to your future path, I will proceed, without further delay, to speak seriously to you about those most extraordinary circumstances which came to my knowledge last night. I need not say that they impressed me most unfavourably with respect to you. Such proceedings have certainly never before been heard of in connection with this establishment. Am I correct, Miss Browne, in supposing that you were so intensely ill-bred as to endeavour to put your head out of the window of a cab for the purpose of stopping the driver? Is that so?’

‘Yes,’ I stammered.

‘And I believe you informed me that the window being closed, you struck your head against the glass and injured yourself?’

I was silent.

‘Answer me directly. Did you do so?’

‘Yes.’

‘And if I recollect rightly, you also stated that you have lost the small amount of money that your mother, out of her straitened income, entrusted to you?’

‘Yes,’ I answered, almost suffocated.

‘I can scarcely believe it even now,’ she went on. ‘My nerves were so disturbed by the sight of your hair and face, that I’ve not felt well ever since. Pass me those smelling-salts from that table.’

I did as she requested. She remained quietly inhaling them for a few moments, and then continued.

‘I presume you have not mentioned your most unpleasant errors to anyone?’

‘Not to anyone,’ I answered. ‘My face was but slightly hurt—it left off bleeding very soon. I kept my veil down in the school-room——’

‘Study, if you please.’

‘I kept my veil down in the study, and no one noticed my face in the bedroom—at least by words.’

‘Very good. I paid the cab-fare, and liquidated the expense of the broken window—on account—and the subject need never again be mentioned by you. That is all I have to say. You can go.’

‘Miss Grimshaw,’ I stammered, with a sudden resolution, ‘may I——’

I was going to say, ‘write to my mother.’ Why such a request should have come to my lips and been nearly spoken, I know not; for one moment’s consideration would have taught me how utterly hopeless it must be. All the pent-up feelings of the day condensed themselves into one moment of agony, and I burst into a violent fit of crying.

‘Dear me, Miss Browne! What is the matter?’

I still sobbed, without replying.

‘What is the matter, Miss Browne? What *can* be the matter with you?’

I could not answer. There was, by this time, so much anger in my emotion, that I would not have answered if I could.



‘I must trouble you to leave the room. You disturb me with this weakness. It shows a very bad and unchristian spirit to display such ill-temper and discontent. I must trouble you to leave the room at once. Pray go immediately. Good-night to you.’

I still made no reply, but bowed and left her presence ; the cold, pitiless eyes yet watching me as I went. Once fairly escaped, I stood on the stairs a few moments to calm myself a little, fearing the curiosity and possible ridicule of my companions, should they observe the traces of tears on my face. As I stood waiting, I first became aware of my acquaintance with a fact, which must in reality have come to my knowledge some minutes previously. This fact was that during the whole of my interview with Miss Grimshaw, there had been seated by the fire, with his profile towards me, a man of gentlemanly exterior, probably about thirty-five years of age. And not only my knowledge of this



fact of his being there became apparent to me, but also I seemed to see him as I must previously have really seen him, sitting with one elbow resting on his knee and his cheek on his hand, looking in the fire with a gaze so intent and a manner so absent, that it appeared to me absolutely impossible that he could have been paying attention to, or even have been aware of the conversation taking place between the other occupants of the apartment. As I thought upon this fact, and wondered at the strangeness of it, a door near me was closed violently, and, alarmed lest I should be detected waiting, I hastily ascended the stairs.

As I approached the dormitories, I heard the sound of laughter and loud voices. I passed through to my particular bedroom, and saw at once upon entering that the gas was up to its full height. Several of my new friends were parading the apartment dressed in sheets, to the no small amusement of most of their companions. One had been cutting

a cake into large portions with a penknife, using a chest of drawers for a table, but had stopped in her occupation to join the burst of merriment. A tiny child, at the further end of the room, was kneeling, with her hands half-folded, entreating the others 'to be quiet a little while she said her prayers.' No one took the slightest notice of her. As I entered there was a dead pause for a moment. Then a tall girl, evidently the ringleader, turned to me, and spoke.

'Miss Browne,' she said, 'I hear you are the new governess for this room. Polly Smith's gone back to No. 4 because we were too much for her. There's been a regular revolution among the bedroom governesses. This is your initiatory night—as one might call it. You'll have to enter in a book every time we've talked, and Grim looks through it, like the washing, every month, and fines us for each occasion on which we've found the use of our tongues. Perhaps you know this already, though, without my telling

you. Now, we're in for it to-night, as you see ; and we may just as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb, as the saying is. Therefore, I say, no going back. How say you, comrades ?' she added, turning to her friends, and speaking in a loud voice.

The 'comrades' received the proposition with cheers, and the prohibited amusements were resumed without further delay.

Too tired to endeavour to exert my newly-born authority, even had I possessed the slightest idea how to set about it, which I did not, I sat down on the side of my bed listlessly waiting till the tempest should be over. With a sudden thought, I glanced across the room. There she was, sitting on her bed like myself, as on the previous night, reading intently. Her face wore the same expression as it had worn then. She was so absorbed in her book, that I am convinced she was as perfectly insensible to what was going on in the room as if she had been a thousand miles away. With an irresistible

impulse I went up to her and placed my hand on her shoulder.

‘Don’t you think you’d better leave off reading? The gas will be out in a minute.’

She took no notice ; and I then adopted the plan which I had seen succeed the night before. I hid from her the page she was reading. She started and looked up angrily.

‘Why do you do that? What do you want?’

As she watched me, the dark expression of her face changed so rapidly to one of sympathy and softness that I was filled with wonder.

‘You’ve been crying,’ she said ; ‘you’re crying now. What’s the matter? Can I do anything for you? Here, sit down by me.’

She threw the book from her with a sort of disdain, and drew me close to her side.

‘What has she been saying to you? What has she said?—Tell me.’

I could not speak, but clung to her closely, crying violently.

She stroked my hair, and held my hand, and tried in every gentle woman's way to soothe and calm me. But still I cried—with a passion and bitterness that almost alarmed myself. Suddenly the gas went out, causing an instantaneous revulsion in the hearts of the revellers. The noise ceased by degrees. One by one the voices were hushed, and in an incredibly short time, nothing was heard but the light breathing of the sleepers. But still I cried, clinging to my companion, my tearful cheek pressed close to hers. We sat a long time, till at length my sobs ceased, and thoroughly wearied, my head drooped on the shoulder of my new friend. Then she spoke softly.

‘You’d better go to bed, dear, now.’

‘I’ve tired you so,’ I said.

‘Oh, no. But go now, or you’ll not be able to get up in time in the morning. Good-night.’

She bent her head, and kissed me. As I returned her caress I began to speak. What

I said I know not—probably some hurried acknowledgment of her pity and tenderness. She interrupted me hastily.

‘Don’t talk like that ; good-night again, dear. Do go now.’

I fancied that she was crying herself. I cannot tell. It may not have been so. But I know that her strange, quick, sudden sympathy—the perfect proof of the intense lovingness of her nature—impressed me so strongly at the moment, that I forgot entirely all I had heard of her pride and waywardness, and could feel nothing for her but gratitude and affection. Just as in after years, her great unselfishness would stand before me full and clear, causing me in my inmost heart—when that heart was not blinded by its passion—to cling to and love her memory through all reports—tinging with its sweet beauty even the strangest and most inexplicable actions of her life.

## CHAPTER V.

A FORTNIGHT passed away, and, as many of my schoolfellows had prophesied to me would be the case, I was 'beginning to get used to it.' The half-past five bell no longer disturbed my slumbers, but found me awake, waiting for its sound. It seemed months since I had left home—everything had become so strangely familiar to me. I had spoken no more to Marion Launceston since the occasion mentioned in the last chapter. She never appeared to care for the society of any of her companions, and had apparently, since her sudden outburst of sympathy for me, forgotten me entirely. Indeed, the peculiar dislike, which I had observed from the first that she possessed to the ordinary chat and habits of school-girls, seemed perfectly



natural to her, and to prevent her seeking their society. In the spare half-hours—though they were few enough—devoted by the other ordinary pupils to recreation, she would disappear entirely. Frequently she was not visible at the tea-table, and as surely as this was the case, so surely did I find her, upon retiring to rest, sitting on her bed reading by the faintest possible jet of gas. How she dared to light it I could not think, for it was the duty of each bedroom governess to illuminate the room herself upon entering for the night, all others being strictly forbidden to do so. But I never interfered with her in regard to this, and, had I done so, I have no doubt she would have quietly submitted to the fine incurred, and offended again the following night. There was no muster-roll after that which took place just before tea-time, and it was after this ceremony she would manage to escape. I have no doubt now in my own mind that Miss Grimshaw must have missed her at prayers, but for some reason or



other she never remarked upon her absence. I must not forget to mention that whenever she acted in this manner, she invariably acknowledged the fact to Miss Grimshaw after prayers the following morning. That lady always inquired mildly the name of the book which had occupied her attention, requiring and exacting the immediate resignation of the same by the delinquent, or allowing her to retain it, according to her own private opinion of its general tendency. One morning it was 'Dombey and Son.' This was confiscated. Another 'Paley's Evidences,' which was spared. Another 'Plato,' which Miss Grimshaw appropriated to herself with a most peculiar expression of countenance—a mixture of doubt and curiosity which appeared to amuse her victim greatly. I think myself she took it to find out what was in it. I don't think she had ever heard of it before. Pope's 'Homer,' 'Don Quixote,' and 'The Letters of Junius' were all among the doomed. My curious friend, on her part, always appeared

to part with her property quite willingly, though it was possibly very doubtful whether she would ever even see any of it again. The missing book was invariably supplied, on the occasion of her next absence, by some fresh attraction, which probably in its turn would be sacrificed. Where she obtained her treasures I don't know to this day, but she seemed so totally indifferent to their loss that it was of no use trying to pity her. I intuitively felt that such a feeling would be wasted. Miss Grimshaw never mentioned her reason for objecting to the books proscribed, except in the case of 'Dombey and Son,' when she descanted at length upon what she was pleased to call the 'grossness' of such a production, and speculated on the probable feelings of its author when he came to lie on his death-bed. At the conclusion of these remarks, Miss Launceston took the liberty of asking Miss Grimshaw whether she had ever perused the work in question ; and, upon that lady candidly answering in the negative, she

was informed by her pupil that, such being the case, she was scarcely competent to express any opinion upon it. To which observation Miss Grimshaw, no doubt wisely, declined to reply.

A fortnight passed, and the day for writing home, the long-looked-for Thursday, came at last. It had been waited for by me with intense longing, for, in accordance with the rules at Victoria College, I had not as yet despatched one epistle to my mother. Her fond, loving one to me had been many days waiting a reply. In my joy at the arrival of this happy day, I almost ceased to feel the dull heaviness and oppression which since the night of my arrival at my new home had remained with me constantly.

The morning crept slowly away. I could scarcely perform my ordinary duties, excitement seemed to take away all power of action. When they were at length completed and dinner over, I found myself seated with dozens of others—to my surprise many of them

almost as eager as myself—preparing for my happy task of writing home. The room was in the most ridiculous state of confusion. Quires of paper scattered promiscuously on the black leather of the tables, innumerable small desks and writing-cases in all directions. I found a quiet corner, and sat down to enjoy my hour of happiness—the noise and confusion around me almost unheard and wholly unnoticed. I have often wondered since how it is possible for people to write letters, laughing and shouting almost the whole of the time, but it is an easy thing for a school-girl to do. Only once before commencing did I turn my attention from the task before me. I raised my eyes and took a general survey. As I did so I caught sight of Marion Launceston, not writing herself, but surrounded by a number of tiny little creatures, for whom she was ruling lines, pencilling capital letters, and otherwise assisting their infant endeavours; in return for which she received sundry kisses and embraces, which she usually returned with

interest. She had certainly the love of the little children, whatever feelings those of a larger growth might entertain for her. My eyes dropped again to the paper, and I began to write.

‘ My dear, dearest Mamma.’

. . . . .

The blinding tears fell fast as I wrote the words. So many memories of home, and the joyful days, now gone for ever, came over my heart, that it was many minutes before my pen again began to move. Then it went on firmly and continuously. It was the first letter that I had ever written to my mother; and through it ran an effort not to grieve her with useless regrets and repinings. The bright gleams in my life since our parting—poor child! how few and dim they were!—were made brighter, and the darkness less dark and gloomy, that those kind eyes while reading might not be filled as mine were as I wrote. In the new-born

tenderness which separation for the first time from a beloved object so often engenders, I said many things in that letter which, had I remained with my mother, would probably never have passed my lips in words. I spoke of my dead father, promising that his memory should ever keep me truthful, obedient, and faithful in my love to her, and my desire to make her happiness the chief wish and end of my life. Then came entreaties for forgiveness for all the waywardness of my childhood, and assurances that my conduct should never again cause her uneasiness. And so the letter was finished.

There seemed to me such a sacredness about this first thorough outpouring of my heart to my mother, that I almost seemed to touch the paper tenderly for the sake of what was written upon it. After directing the envelope and sealing it carefully, I pressed it unseen to my lips, and placed it lingeringly in the letter-box provided at one end of the study for the reception of all epistles destined

for the post-office. By this time the procession was forming for tea, and I joined it with a light heart, and in a happier frame of mind than I had been for many days. When the meal was over, I repaired to my little room as usual to practise my music. I had already begun to look forward to this hour as the happiest that fell to my daily lot. There was repose in it, at least more than I enjoyed during any other portion of the day; and this night the pleasant thought of the joy my letter would give to its recipient doubled my pleasure. The time had nearly expired when my happiness was rudely interrupted. The door of my room was suddenly opened, and Marion Launceston entered.

‘Good evening,’ she said, with a smile on her earnest face; ‘I have a message for you.’

‘From Miss Grimshaw?’ I asked, with a cold fear, of what, I could scarcely tell.

‘Of course from Miss Grimshaw. No one else dares to send messages about; it would be encroaching on her privileges. *I*



was not sent to you, but one of the children who did not know your room, so I took the duty off her shoulders. What is the matter?' she added quickly; 'are you not well? You look quite pale.'

A dread of seeing her was strong upon me. I felt the message entailed this, though it had not yet been delivered.

'I am not ill, thank you. Please tell me what Miss Grimshaw wants.'

'That which you are doubtless fearing,' she replied. 'She wishes to see you.'

'Now—down in the drawing-room?'

'Yes.'

'Do you know what for?'

'No; not at all. You should go at once. It will be the sooner over. Do you imagine that because your last encounter with her was unpleasant, that this must necessarily be so?'

I laughed uneasily.

'Come, take courage. I can't tell you this time what she's going to say, but I really



do not think it is likely to be anything disagreeable.'

'But what *can* she have to say?'

'Oh! fifty things. Tell you to dress your hair differently—she's very particular about governess-pupils, you know—or ask you how many pocket-handkerchiefs you are possessed of; or if your best boots want soleing and heeling; or whether you like the bread-and-butter—in other words, stale-crust—puddings the cook favours us with so often. It is something equally important, you may be sure.'

I understood the kindness which prompted this reply, and going nearer to her, I took her hand and kissed it.

'What a strange girl you are!' she said.  
'Why did you do that?'

'You are so good to me.'

'Very indeed!' But in spite of the half-bantering tone, she looked tenderly at me. Then hastily kissing my cheek, she told me I had better go at once, as it was just prayer-time.

Following her advice, I started off immediately, and descended to the drawing-room. The precautionary knock was not forgotten this time.

‘Come in,’ said Miss Grimshaw.

The voice was as distinct and decided as it had been on the occasion of my last visit, if possible, still more harsh and stern. I entered. She was seated in the same chair and place as at our last similar interview, but this time was busily occupied, with a pen in her hand. Piles of letters were lying on the table before her. As I advanced she put down the pen. The same peculiar fancy that I had had that former time that she had seen me through the door came over me now, and I felt as nervous and uncomfortable as I had felt then. But whether or not she had seen me through the door, she seemed determined to see me well now. The cold impassible eyes were fixed on me with such a resolute expression, that my own dropped before them painfully, and I trembled.

‘Miss Browne.’

‘Yes,’ I answered.

‘Look at me, Miss Browne.’

I did so. In raising my eyes to her face they fell upon another—that of a well-dressed man, seated near the fire. He was some distance from Miss Grimshaw, as it might be to the north-east of her. He was sitting with one leg over the other, leaning back, with his hands in his pockets. He had the appearance of a gentleman, but he was not behaving as one. He was examining my face closely, with a singular look on his own—a mixed expression of interest and amusement, which roused in me a feeling of indignation. I was just at that age when girls like to be treated by men with a faint show of deference. He was regarding me as though I were a child of six or seven years, from whom he expected to get some entertainment during the coming conversation. I was full of anger against him, but was not too absorbed by my own feeling to notice that his face was bright

and sharp, and had a look like an eagle. My eyes only rested on it a few moments, but I noticed this peculiar look instantaneously. I knew him at once. He was the man I had seen in the room the last time I was in it. As I raised my glance in obedience to Miss Grimshaw, she spoke.

‘I want to talk to you, Miss Browne, about your letter to your mother.’

I looked at her in wonder, quite bewildered. I had not the least notion what she was going to say respecting it. ‘I don’t understand,’ I stammered. ‘They told me I might write to-day, and I wrote. I put the letter in the box myself. Oh! I hope it has not got torn up by mistake!’

She waited till I had finished speaking, then went on calmly, utterly ignoring my excited utterances.

‘I suppose you are aware that all letters that leave this house are under my *surveillance*, all being perused by myself before leaving it. In the particular letter to which

I allude—I mean the one written by yourself this day to your mother—you have thought proper to speak of me in most disrespectful terms—though otherwise it is well worded and indited. I believe the epithet you applied to me, Miss Browne, was that of a “hard-hearted, thin-lipped, sour, old curmudgeon;” but you considerately add, that I am “probably not without good points had one the leisure to find them out.”—I believe the quotation is correct as I repeat it to you, is it not, Mr. Harrop?’

‘Perfectly so, madam,’ said the gentleman she addressed, who was still watching me with the slightest perceptible smile on his face. ‘Perfectly so. They are the very identical syllables.’

‘Now, Miss Browne,’ she continued, ‘passing over the insult to myself these words express, it only remains for me to state——’

She stopped suddenly, and her look changed. She became visibly paler, though she never once moved her eyes from my face.

What she saw there was perhaps even by her scarcely definable, but probably the mixture of conflicting feelings struggling in my heart for utterance produced some quick change in my expression which surprised and alarmed her. I was not there at all. It was some fearful passion of my childhood, and my father was standing by, as in days long gone, trying to quell it. Even his memory was powerless now. Nothing could stay my angry rage. All my fear was gone. My eye caught the open letter on the table. To rush forward and seize it was the work of an instant. Then speech came, and utterly regardless of consequences, I broke into a passionate torrent of words.

‘You are a mean, dishonourable woman!’ I said. ‘I can’t bear to be near you! I am degraded by being in the same room with you! You’ve done what a thief would do—opened and read another person’s letter. Papa used to teach us that it was worse than stealing money to do such a thing. I hate you. I’m not afraid of you—I—I——’

She opened her lips.

‘Don’t speak,’ I said. ‘Don’t speak. I can’t bear to hear a word. I oughtn’t to be here. I won’t stay. You shall never see another letter of mine. My first letter to *her*. Oh! my dear, dear mamma! Everyone shall know of it. I’ll go and tell them all!’

I had already gained the door, and opened it, when a strong hand was laid upon my shoulder. It moved me forcibly back. In my passion I struck at it blindly. The owner of it laughed, with a ring in his laugh of the most intense amusement, and with difficulty drew me into the room and placed me on a chair.

‘Sit there, till you are calmer and more reasonable,’ he said, in a stern tone. ‘Do you see how your improper conduct has disturbed that lady?’

I mechanically followed his eyes to her face, and in its white vindictive look saw the consequences of my folly. She was hold-



ing up her hand as if warding me off like a blow ; but still looking at me. He evidently understood the meaning of the action—for removing his hand from my shoulder and himself from before me—

‘Go at once,’ he said. ‘Miss Grimshaw wishes you to leave the room immediately.’

I rose quickly, and the letter which I had hitherto retained fell from my hand. He picked it up and held it towards me. I did not wait to thank him. Snatching it from his hand, I rushed from the room, slamming the door violently behind me ; and scarcely knowing where I went, ran wildly up the stairs, and burst into my bedroom breathless.

My companions, who were preparing for rest, started at my sudden entrance. In a moment, half their faces were as white as my own.

‘Oh ! what’s the matter ? Come here. Shut the door. Oh ! do speak. Give her some water. Is she ill ? Is the college on fire ? Pray speak !’



‘No! It’s not that. I’m not ill. The college is *not* on fire. It’s Miss Grimshaw!’

‘Miss Grimshaw? What has *she* done?’

‘It’s that wicked woman downstairs. She’s opened my letter to mamma and read it. I can’t bear it. It’s too much. I—I——’

‘Oh! Is that all?’ broke in a clear, cool voice. ‘That’s nothing. She always does that—at least, it’s the rule that she can do it when she chooses. You’ll *have* to bear it. But it certainly *is* a great shame,’ continued the same speaker, after a pause—as if she were trying to lash herself into indignation against a wrong, of which long-continued endurance had softened the bitterness—‘it certainly *is* a great shame that we can never say what we want to when we write home, because of her old peering eyes seeing it all. I always keep what *I* want to say till I *see* the people—but it’s horrid sometimes. She’s an old monster. I wish somebody had the courage to tell her of her abominable ways. Jezebel’s nothing to her.’

‘I’ve done it,’ I said. ‘I’ve told her she’s a mean dishonourable woman, and it’s a disgrace to anyone to be in the same room with her.’

A dead silence followed this announcement. I cast my eyes round, and saw that Marion Launceston, who, seated as usual on the side of her bed, had the moment before been, also as usual, apparently reading, was now looking intently at me, with a ludicrous expression of dismay on her countenance. I could scarcely understand whether it was real or feigned. Not troubling myself about it, however, I turned from her, and continued my speech more rapidly than before.

‘I told her she was like a thief—that I hated and detested her—that I couldn’t bear to be in the same house with her—that she——’

They interrupted me with frantic exclamations.

‘Oh! I’m so glad! Whatever did she say? I wonder how you dared!’

‘Dared!’ I said—‘Dared! There was

no daring in it. If she were the greatest queen on earth, I would have said it. I would have said it a thousand times rather than she should not have heard it, even though I'd been tortured for every time. I can't express how I despise and hate her.'

'Well, but do tell us about it,' broke in a voice.

'There's scarcely anything to tell but what I've told you.'

'Well, but tell us it all from the very beginning.'

So I went through it in detail, accompanied by many quick eager remarks from the excited listeners, till, at length, I sank down upon my bed, utterly exhausted with passionate emotion. They then gathered in groups, breaking out occasionally into expressions of admiration of my 'courage,' as they termed it, and speculating audibly as to the probability of my expulsion from the college. But the consequences of my folly seemed as nothing to me then. I buried my

head in the bed-clothes and tried to calm myself, for my emotion had tired me out. But my passion was not yet spent. Some expression—I forget now what it was—uttered by one of my excited companions, roused me again. I began another angry tirade on Miss Grimshaw. In the midst of it the door opened, and the subject of my eloquence stood before me. She was so calm, collected, and altogether frozen that I was stricken dumb instantly, and in the silence that followed her entrance I stood trembling with a new terror.

‘You are all fined on the High Penal List. Miss Browne, follow me.’

I did so, with as much indifference in my manner as I could possibly assume. She led the way to a very small room, containing the commonest of bedroom furniture. I knew this apartment to be called ‘The Black Room,’ and to be devoted exclusively to the immolation of those unfortunates who had been guilty of offences for which, in the rules

of the college, there was no authorised legal punishment. I had been told that within the memory of the present oldest pupil no one had been confined there. This honour, however, had been reserved for me.

‘You will occupy this room,’ said Miss Grimshaw, ‘except when engaged in your scholastic duties, until measures have been taken for your formal expulsion from Victoria College. You are forbidden to converse, or hold any communication, with the young ladies your late associates, except your pupils, to whom you must necessarily speak in connection with their studies.’

She shut the door without another word, and turning the key upon me, left me in the dark, alone with my fierce pride and passion. They kept with me long, as I paced up and down the miserable room, beating and bruising my clenched hands against the bare walls, like a poor bird in a cage. But this state of feeling could not last for ever. When the grey dawn came stealing in like a wandering

angel, it found nothing but a broken-hearted girl, with disordered dress and dishevelled hair, lying on the bed, occasionally weeping, remorsefully upbraiding herself for the past (though conscious of a certain degree of right). Broken-hearted at the remembrance of tender disregarded words which had come from lips now dead and cold for ever—broken-hearted at the recollection of those written promises—even now clasped closely to her breast—at the very first temptation so completely broken and despised. Bursting, at intervals, into fierce invectives against the object of her resentment, and then hushing and checking her words and thoughts when scarcely half-expressed, as if afraid to say them to the dawning golden light!

## CHAPTER VI.

IT was broad day. I rose, bathed my swollen eyes, and sat thinking. The half-past-five bell rang. It was still sounding when my ear caught, in addition, the noise of a foot-step, followed by the unlocking of my door. Though I knew by this that I was expected to proceed to my duties at six o'clock as usual, I took no notice of the warning, at least as far as any preparation for my work was concerned. When the steps of this turnkey died away in the distance, the poor prisoner resigned herself to her miserable thoughts till the sounds of life—noisy and many—falling upon her ears, warned her that action was imperative. Then she made the best toilette possible, opened the door, and walked forth to her duties.

My programme for the day was already arranged. It was simply—silence. This resolution was not the result of any fear of disobeying Miss Grimshaw, but proceeded from a strong desire to show that amiable person that I had no intention of wilfully opposing her; and that my conduct of the previous evening had not been the result merely of a spirit of defiance. Not that there was any idea in my mind that she really thought such to be the case. I felt quite certain from my observation of her that she had sufficient perception to understand that my passion had been at once sudden, genuine, and ungovernable, and I was desirous of giving her no ground for expressing in the future—for *any* purpose—a contrary opinion.

I decided also to concentrate in my look as much contempt for herself as possible, for the recollection of the wrong she had done me was still fresh and clear in my mind. I say ‘wrong,’ for it not only appeared to me



as such then, but it appears to me the same now. Sitting quietly that morning, hearing my first pupil practise, the resolution to act as I have stated grew stronger, till it was momentarily forgotten in a sudden recollection which shocked and stunned me.

‘Till measures have been taken for your expulsion from the college.’

In my excitement this sentence had hitherto entirely slipped my memory, now it came upon me with full force, seeming to sound in my ears for the first time. *I was disgraced for life.* So it appeared to me in the girlish agony of the moment. My error would break my mother’s heart! It would ruin my name for ever! Yet, through all my pain, I had such a consciousness that my indignation at Miss Grimshaw’s conduct had been, in itself, natural and just, and that my sin had consisted merely in the mistimed expression of that indignation, and in the fact that it had been expressed to *her*, and without the slightest attempt at self-control, that

as I reflected my misery lessened, and my pride and fortitude revived.

Eight o'clock came, and prayers, and—Miss Grimshaw. Whether, or not, she was ashamed of herself was, and still is, a mystery to me ; but one thing is certain, during the whole time of her stay in the study she never once raised her eyes to my face. Mine were fixed on her intently, during the whole of her morning performance. When she had retired, I joined the assembly walking round the room to get into breakfast order. *No* one spoke to me. This, no doubt, in obedience to directions previously received. My eyes fell on Marion Launceston. Her face wore the same earnest pitying look that I recollected seeing on it for a moment the night before, as Miss Grimshaw led me from the room. As she met my glance she smiled kindly and encouragingly, bringing a rush of tears to my eyes. I did not dare to look at her again, for fear my fortitude should give way entirely.

The day passed miserably and drearily. There was a dreadful presentiment upon me that Miss Grimshaw's offended dignity would require some public expiation on my part, and I had fixed upon my private evening hour as the time when the terrible ordeal would have to be gone through. The exact form of this trial did not present itself to my mind, but I felt certain that, in any case, my expulsion from the college would not take place, without the reason for my dismissal being stated in my presence to my assembled schoolfellows. But the hour I had feared arrived, and no summons. I sat in my little music-room trembling, but after the first quarter of an hour felt comparatively safe. In my sleep that night strange dreams disturbed me, rousing me to wakefulness in vague terror, leaving me in the morning unrefreshed and wearied, and with the same restless apprehension on my mind that I had experienced the previous day, as to what I might be called upon to endure before that little

room should again afford me a temporary asylum.

But the morning, noon, and evening passed quietly. The day was gone. Another passed—another—and another. I began to hope. Perhaps, after all, the whole extent of my sentence was to be solitary confinement for an indefinite period, and silence during Miss Grimshaw's pleasure. Perhaps her words, in spite of the calm, frozen look that had accompanied them, had been spoken in the heat of the moment, and I was already enduring the worst portion of my punishment. When a week had gone by, this timid hope had grown into almost certainty. My pride kept with me still; my face wearing the same haughty look, in Miss Grimshaw's presence, which I had studiously schooled it to wear since the first night of my incarceration. Perhaps it deepened as my trust that my enemy would not put into execution her threat of expulsion grew in strength and in-

tensity. But I was partly mistaken in my calculations.

One evening, nearly a fortnight after the commission of my offence, the dreadful moment came ; the more dreadful from the false hopes which had been so long blinding me. Tea was just over, when, raising my eyes, they encountered the unexpected apparition of Miss Grimshaw advancing up the dining-room. Arrived in the centre of the apartment, she stopped and took a general survey of the room and its occupants. By this time she had attracted the attention of everyone present. Having accomplished this object, she paused for a moment, and then spoke as follows :—

‘ Young ladies, repair instantly to the study. No one must be absent. I wish to speak to all of you.’

I grew faint with the suddenness of it ; never doubting for a moment what was coming. My eyes dropped under the anxious battery of glances. There was no time for

reflection. I was almost carried from my seat, and moved along with the living rank into the study, where the inmates of each bedroom quickly ranged themselves at their respective tables as if for prayers. I learnt afterwards that this was the custom whenever Miss Grimshaw honoured her pupils with any unusual address on any subject whatever. This lady was in this instance already present, having passed from the dining-room by her private door. I could not look at her now as I had done the past few days. My pride and resolution had given way, and the old vague terror taken their place. Some one in passing to her table touched me purposely on the shoulder, and I caught from the dark eyes a quick, kind glance of encouragement. It gave me nerve for a moment, but it passed like a flash of light.

The whistle was sounded. Then the dead silence which always succeeded. My heart was beating audibly. My enemy waited nearly a minute before she began speaking—

not, I really believe, so much to give effect to her words as to increase my apprehension. The moments seemed to me like hours.

‘Miss Browne—from bedroom No. 6—advance, and stand in the middle of the room.’

At the first sound my pride came back, though my terror was as great as ever. I knew she would delight in my suffering, and with a mighty effort I did all I could to conceal the slightest sign of it.

I advanced as commanded, with a firm step, at the same time glancing round in expectation of seeing those hundreds of eyes fixed upon me. With the exception of Miss Grimshaw’s I could not perceive that even one was raised. From that moment my fear grew less and my confidence greater.

‘All present look at Miss Browne.’

Upwards of two hundred heads with their shining eyes were turned hurriedly towards me for a moment, then as hastily turned away again.



‘Keep your attention fixed on Miss Browne.’

‘We are all doing so, Miss Grimshaw. It would be impossible to do otherwise.’

‘Was that Miss Launceston who spoke?’

‘Yes, Miss Grimshaw. I said, it would be impossible for us to fail to direct our attention as you wish.’

‘You are fined, Miss Launceston, on the High Penal List, for speaking without permission under such circumstances as the present.’

‘Yes, Miss Grimshaw.’

She spoke in a respectful tone, but her voice sounded bright and quick, and as I glanced at her, I saw that her eyes were dark and brilliant with an expression which, at the moment, I could not attempt to fathom.

‘Keep your attention fixed on Miss Browne.’

The heads were again moved round, for a moment, this time, sullenly, but, as far as I could see, not a dozen eyes were raised.



Perhaps the general feeling was stronger than Miss Grimshaw expected, or she had some dread of another remark from her determined pupil, for she hesitated to press the point. I felt almost grateful to her, though perfectly aware that it was anything but pity for myself that actuated her conduct.

‘Listen to me, all of you. You are assembled here this evening to be addressed by me, your instructress, in a very solemn manner. You are all aware that the person now standing in the middle of the room, and exposed to your observation, was, some nights previously, guilty of the grossest misconduct towards me, such misconduct as I have never before had the humiliation of witnessing in my establishment. It is not necessary for me to enter into detail. My feelings of just, I may say righteous, indignation forbid my doing so. I will not even mention the nature of the offence against me. Suffice it to say, it was most disgraceful and appalling. I am now about to address Miss Browne in your

presence, in order that you as well as she may hear and fully comprehend the nature of the punishment which I deem it expedient to inflict on her.'

'Miss Browne!'

'Yes, Miss Grimshaw,' I answered firmly, looking boldly at her, but trembling in every limb.

'Listen to me with dread and shame. After mature deliberation, I have decided upon not adhering to my first-formed resolution of expelling you from Victoria College. The reason for this is simply my pity for your mother, and a desire to spare the feelings for which her daughter has no respect nor reverence whatever.'

She knew the cruelty of the untruth she had uttered. I could see it in her face.

'Knowing her poverty,' she continued, 'and that she is naturally anxious to be relieved of the burden of your maintenance——'

'She is not so,' I interrupted.

'Naturally anxious,' she repeated, 'to be

delivered from the burden of your maintenance—and her gratitude to the gentleman who so charitably pays for her the very small stipend I receive for your board and education——’

‘It is untrue,’ I said.

‘Your board and education,’ she went on—‘I am unwilling to add to her afflicted state by throwing you back upon her slender resources. I repeat, I have more respect and pity for her than her own and only daughter has.’

They were well-aimed blows, and told deeply. Had she known me all my little life, and probed every feeling of my heart, they could not have been better directed. It is strange to me to think now that the poor, wretched, trembling child, at length thoroughly silenced by the contempt with which her interruptions had been passed over, standing helpless before her tormentor—was myself.

‘But I lose time,’ she continued. ‘I

simply wished that all present should know the sole reason why I hesitate to expel you from my establishment.'

'It is not your establishment,' broke in a loud, clear voice. 'It's Mr. Harrop's establishment.'

Had a thunderbolt fallen in the room, it could scarcely have caused greater consternation. Miss Grimshaw's face turned white to the very lips, and I really believe that she was for the moment incapable of uttering a sound. When she *did* speak, it was in the same calm tone as before. There is no doubt she possessed a wonderful power of self-control.

'The person who made that remark will be dealt with by me, alone, on some future occasion. I will now return to you, Miss Browne.'

I am certain that she was aware now that she had been pushing matters too far, and was in fear of a general rebellion. I also know that everyone present but myself

knew for a surety the identity of the speaker of the bold words—a fact I never suspected at the time.

‘I will return to you, Miss Browne. I wished, I repeat, that all present should know the reason of my leniency towards you, and now this object is accomplished. No doubt the motive which actuates my conduct is duly appreciated by all to whom I have communicated it; and feeling certain that this is the case, I can undertake to say that none of your fellow-students will object to again receiving you as one of their community, though I do not consider you at present fit to be an associate of any of them, nor do I intend you to be so, till there is ground for concluding that you are a reformed character. Your punishment is this. For two months longer you will continue to lead the life you have led since you so egregiously offended me. Your schoolfellows are not to address you unnecessarily under pain of the severest penalties; while you, on your

part, are forbidden to speak to anyone, except to your pupils with respect to their studies, or to your superiors with respect to your own, under pain of immediate expulsion. During the term of your expiation you will continue to occupy The Black Room as a sleeping apartment. I have written to your mother, informing her of your conduct towards me, and the circumstances in which you are placed, and have also informed her that, in part punishment of your sin, you are not to receive letters from, or write to her, during the continuance of the present term. A note has come to hand from her in reply, in which she expresses, though not willingly (for she cannot, in spite of all, forget that you are her child), her consent to this arrangement, and encloses a few lines for you—which have been read by me, and which I do not object to your receiving—most undeserved in their tenderness for you, but, at the same time, showing her bitter grief and disappointment at your unexpected and disgraceful con-

duct. Miss Thomson,' turning to the head-teacher, 'may I trouble you to pass this to Miss Browne?'

I saw her walking towards me in a mist—all mist and shadows, and strange forms, and a quick cry from many young, pitying voices, and great darkness—and I fell to the ground, and knew no more.

## CHAPTER VII.

I WAS conscious of a sense of distance. I can call it nothing else. Whether of time or place, I knew not; it seemed impossible to me to understand anything without unclosing my eyelids, and they felt too heavy to be moved. 'Perhaps,' I said to myself, 'when I once get power to raise them, the meaning of the present will dawn upon me.' But even the exertion of thought stupefied me; so I lay still, with my eyes still closed, fast relapsing into unconsciousness.

Something moved under my head. With a sudden effort I opened my eyes. I was in bed. There was an old gentleman standing by me, and a kind woman's face peeping over his shoulder. My eyes closed again involuntarily, with a sudden sense of blinding light.



‘You must keep her quiet,’ said a man’s voice in a gentle tone. ‘All danger is over now ; but don’t let her talk.’ Then I heard a step ; it died in the distance, and all was silent.

‘What is the matter ?’ I exclaimed feebly, trying to rise in the bed, and again opening my eyes.

‘Hush ! you must not speak. You have been very ill indeed. You’re in the Infirmary, you know. You’ll have everything you want here, poor child !’

It was the old nurse belonging to the college. She pressed her lips to my forehead, told me again to lie still, and took her seat on a chair by the side of my bed. So she tended me carefully. I never relapsed into the state from which I had escaped. I slept half my time away ; and the days passed, and I grew stronger and stronger, and able to enjoy the peaceful rest that God had sent me.

It was such a quiet calm, that I should

have been contented for it never to end. The thought of the future made me cling still more closely to the comfort of the moment. The remembrance of the past seemed terrible to me; but though the bitterness of memory grew more bitter day by day, as I weakly pondered more and more on what could never now be undone, all else that I had suffered, and might have to suffer, seemed light in comparison with my estrangement from my mother. That there had been unfair work I was certain—misrepresentations on Miss Grimshaw's part, perhaps even absolute falsehood—and yet I had no remedy; I must remain helpless, unable to defend myself. But my very unhappiness lengthened the term of my rest, for doubtless the uneasiness of mind I endured retarded my recovery. It was evident the old doctor suspected there was some abnormal cause for the slowness of my convalescence, for he would occasionally look at me with a grave shake of the head, and once

asked me quietly if I were 'fretting about anything.'

Scarcely understanding for the moment the drift of the question, I answered in the negative; and after looking searchingly at me, he went away muttering to himself in a very discontented fashion.

About a week after my recovery to consciousness, Miss Grimshaw commenced a series of periodical visits to my bedside. Our first meeting was awkward and constrained on both sides, with an evident effort on her part to impress me with the idea that she was utterly unconscious of having been in any way the cause of my illness. She appeared to have forgiven me—at all events, as far as her manner was concerned—for the offence which had occasioned her cruelty. She called to see me every other day. Her mode of address to me was invariably more gentle than it had been before my illness began, or, more properly speaking, less hard and stern; and she always pronounced me

‘much better,’ without ever asking my opinion on the subject.

‘Get her well as fast as you can, doctor,’ she would say (for she never appeared but when the dear old gentleman was visiting me). ‘Get her well as fast as you can. I must have her up and about soon.’

I always felt cold directly she entered the room, and gradually recovered my warmth after her departure. Three or four weeks went by, and now I used to rise after breakfast and sit up the greater part of the day; but I was still very weak. I would remain at the window for hours together, thinking idly, watching the birds on the lawn, or trying to recognise the figures that passed down the conservatory which formed the passage from one wing of the college to the other. (The infirmary, I should have mentioned, stood alone, apart from any other portion of the establishment.)

After I had once risen from my bed, Miss Grimshaw ceased her visits for a time,

and when she again made her appearance, she resumed much of her old tone and manner. She opened the door, and marched into the room with such a decided air, and so much as if she had a purpose in view which she had determined to accomplish before leaving it again, that my old dread and fear of her came back with tenfold force. The doctor was, as usual, present when she entered.

‘Well, Miss Browne,’ she said, advancing towards me as I rose to receive her, ‘and how are you by this time?’

‘Much better, thank you,’ I answered; ‘very much better.’

She evidently liked this, for she went on in a more genial tone.

‘I’m glad to hear it, as I wish you to resume your duties as soon as possible. Your place is but ill-supplied. When do you think you can begin?’

‘At once, if you like, Miss Grimshaw.’

‘I’m glad to hear that also. Dr. Long’

—turning to my old friend, who had been listening to the conversation in silence, with his mouth arranged as if for whistling—  
‘Dr. Long, when do you think Miss Browne can return to her occupations?’

The comical old mouth resumed its natural position, and he replied very quickly and sharply—

‘Not for a month, madam—or probably more. Two will be nearer the mark.’

‘Oh, very well, Dr. Long,’ said his irritated listener, in a calm tone, but with a dangerous gleam in her cold eyes. ‘Of course you know best, only she seems so anxious to be at work again.’

‘No, indeed; I am not at all anxious,’ I exclaimed hastily. Then, recollecting myself, ‘But if you wish it, Miss Grimshaw, I can recommence my duties at once—I am quite——’

‘At once!’ the old gentleman interrupted. ‘At once! Miss Grimshaw—madam—she’s delirious again! She must not

even leave this room for six weeks at the least !’

‘Very well,’ said Miss Grimshaw again ; ‘I have nothing more to say, Dr. Long. Good morning to you ;’ and she sailed off without taking any further notice of either of us.

My dear old friend (I always think of him as such, even then) now favoured me with a most comical look and a few hurried words of kindness, and then left me to my thoughts, which, at the prospect of such a long continuance of my calm, were more pleasant than usual.



## CHAPTER VIII.

A FORTNIGHT passed away, and no repetition of Miss Grimshaw; but at the end of that time I had another visitor. It was Marion Launceston. She came in so quietly one afternoon, while I was watching the figures in the conservatory, that her entrance was unknown to me till she put her hand on my shoulder. I started with surprise and pleasure.

‘Well,’ she said, taking both my hands in hers, and looking me in the face. ‘How are you now? Poor, pale little thing! Come, speak to me. What—won’t you speak?’

I shook my head with tearful eyes, and, releasing one of my hands, placed the fingers on my lips.

‘Oh, I see. Well, I won’t keep you in



suspense even for the pleasure of witnessing your resolution. Miss Grimshaw's given permission, and I've come over to have a confab. Now, what do you say ?'

'I'm so glad,' I said, 'and so surprised to see you, that I don't know what to say.'

'Then don't say anything,' she said, kneeling down in front of my chair, and putting her arms round me. 'Be silent, if you are happier so ; but it makes me sad to see you looking so pale and ill. How astonished you were when you saw me—and not speaking too ! Did you really think I had defied the enemy, and appeared here and endeavoured to induce you to talk, without her sanction ? You give me credit for a considerable amount of daring, at all events.'

'How *did* you manage to persuade Miss Grimshaw to let you come ?'

'Why, I simply told her I wanted to see you, and she merely said I could run over if I liked. She has her weak moments, you

know. 'The thing is to find out when they are likely to come on.'

'How long may you stay?'

'All the evening, if you like.'

'Of course I like,' I said.

'I wanted to see you, and talk to you—to find out what you're made of, as people call it.'

'Can't you make me out?' I asked, laughing.

'I don't know. There are some difficult points about you. How you surprised me that night about the letter! Do you know that before that memorable evening, I thought you one of the most timid, nervous girls I had ever met with.'

'And you were right. I am very, very timid.'

'It looked like it.'

'You don't understand,' I said hastily. 'If you will just let me reason with you for a moment——'

'Reason—nonsense! Women can't reason, you know.'

‘Can’t they?’

‘Of course not. I should have imagined you knew that by this time. You’ll find it out as the years go on, but perhaps will be too proud to acknowledge it.’

‘I hope not,’ I said. ‘I like always to be truthful.’

‘It is a difficult thing to be, though. And yet I hate untruth with all my soul, and those who patronise it too. Miss Grimshaw, for instance.’

‘Do you hate Miss Grimshaw? And does not she tell the truth?’

‘Well, perhaps it’s rather strong to say I hate her; but she’s what the children call “a dreadful story-teller.” I really believe she never speaks the truth willingly. She prefers a falsehood. There’s a pleasant dash in it that’s exciting to her.’

The thought of the probable contents of her letter to my mother came upon my heart with a bitter pang.

‘There’s only one person of my acquaint-

ance who can compete with her in the art of lying—excuse my plain-speaking—and that's Mr. Harrop.'

'Mr. Harrop?' I said. 'Who is he?'

'Don't you know who Mr. Harrop is?'

'Oh, yes, to be sure! Now I think of it. I've seen him. He was in the drawing-room the night of my encounter with Miss Grimshaw. She called him Mr. Harrop.'

'Did he hear your little chat with Miss Grimshaw?' she asked, in astonishment.

'Yes, he was in the room all the time.'

'What did he say?'

I went through the scene as it had occurred.

'Ah!' she said, when my narrative was completed. 'He is a strange man. You'll know him better some day.'

'Do you know much of him?'

'My father has been acquainted with him for many years. I have not often seen him, but can remember him as long as I can remember anything.'

‘Do you like him?’

‘Not at all.’

‘Why not? Has he ever been unkind to you?’

‘No, you silly child! Of course not. It’s not that. I dislike his character. Besides, I should never dislike a man because he had injured or annoyed *me* personally, though I should do so because of his being capable of wilfully injuring or annoying anyone. Mr. Harrop is not honest and straightforward. There’s only one thing I admire in him, and that is, his courage and boldness.’

‘He has one good point, then?’

‘Dozens of them I’ve no doubt. But this is what I mean. He and Miss Grimshaw both tell untruths, yet even in the commission of the error you almost admire Mr. Harrop, because he brings this same quality of boldness into play, while you despise Miss Grimshaw absolutely, simply because she has none of it, and performs in a cowardly manner that which cowardice dictates.’

‘How do you mean?’

‘Why, when Miss Grimshaw has a lie to tell—not a common every-day one, you know, they’re as plentiful as pins—but a real good long one without a particle of truth about it, she goes at it as if she were afraid of it. She generally prefaces it with a text of Scripture as if to give her a fillip for the undertaking, in the same way as some people will drink wine before attempting anything they fear doing, and usually ends with a lament on the wickedness of the world in general, and some few individuals in particular. Now our friend Mr. Harrop is quite different.’

‘How so?’

‘Why, when he’s got anything of the sort on hand, he goes to work in such a decided way that even if facts within your knowledge distinctly prove the untruth of his words, you seem to have some sort of belief in what he’s saying. This has happened to me several times. I really think that he sometimes gets to believe in the truth of his own falsehoods,

at least while he is uttering them. None but those who know him thoroughly ever doubt his word, you know.'

I burst out laughing.

'It's a fact,' she said. 'He's never disconcerted by anything. I assure you that if you, as a stranger to him, were to bring forward the most incontestable proofs of the untruth of anything he stated, he would still persist in asserting its truth, and with such pertinacity, and such apparent unconsciousness of the possibility of your doubting his veracity (whatever your personal opinion might be as to his want of knowledge of the subject on which he was speaking), that you'd probably end—for the time, you know—in believing what he said, doubting the evidence of facts, your own sense and judgment, and everything else but what he chose to say. Now, I can't help admiring him for his courage and determination, and despising Miss Grimshaw for her indecision and cowardice. If ever I make up my mind for a thorough



course of untruth, I'll set to work as he does or not do it at all. He's *real*, you know, even in his lies. Miss Grimshaw is only a sham.'

'I don't think as you do,' I said. 'I don't admire courage either moral or physical, when exerted in a wrong cause.'

'Yes, you do. You admire the courage, but regret that it should be exerted in a cause unworthy of it. That's it, is it not?'

'Yes; that's what I mean.'

'Well, now we'll leave these worthy people, and talk of something else. I never like to keep long to one subject. How do you like college life?'

'Not at all.'

'And the noble army of students? What do you think of them?'

'I know so little of them yet.'

'Well, you lose nothing. They are emphatically a collection of school-girls, most of them fair specimens of the class. I'm a school-girl too,' she added, laughing. 'I



don't wish to make myself out superior to my neighbours, but there are so many unschool-girl-like feelings about me that I don't feel as if I were one. I seem to have lived so much longer than anyone here.'

'But you have not.'

'In years—no. But people are not often—or rather are not always—the same age as their years. Don't laugh,' she said, laughing herself though, 'I'll soon make you see what I mean. Have you ever read Bailey's "Festus"?''

'I have never even heard of it.'

'Well, it is a poem. It is a lifetime of deep thought put into English words. It seemed, on my first reading it, to mature so many of my own almost unformed ideas, that I could not for some time divest myself of an impression that I'd read it somewhere before. Have you ever had that feeling when you have been reading a book?'

'I don't think I have.'

'Now these lines in it,' she went on, 'ex-

press what I mean by saying that I seem to have lived longer than anyone here—

We should count time by heart-throbs.

He lives most who thinks most.'

She repeated the words with a kind of reverence.

'Do you understand now what I mean?'

'Yes, perfectly.'

'Well, I think I've thought more than most girls of my age—more than any of the girls here, at all events—so that I feel older than any of them.'

'You read a great deal, do you not?' I asked, after a pause.

'No, not much. Not so much as I should wish. I know nothing, absolutely nothing. My ignorance makes me hate myself.'

'Why, everyone thinks you so clever!'

'It's everyone's want of knowledge, then, that makes everyone think so, not my attainments. All things are heightened or depressed by comparison. In comparison with the acquirements of my companions

here, I may know much ; in comparison with those who really have knowledge, I am in the deepest ignorance. I know nothing at all.'

She looked so beautiful, and thoughtful, and earnest, that I watched her in silence, not knowing what to say. Catching the sound of a piano in the distance, I asked her if she liked music.

'Yes ; but not all kinds. I like Beethoven, and Mendelssöhn, and Mozart. Their works seem to me like great poems full of passionate yearnings for the good and beautiful—full of grand utterances of noble thoughts and feelings. I don't believe,' she went on, excitedly, 'that any mere language-poem can be more replete with true poetry than good music. It is not everyone who has the power to understand it, you know. Most people are caught by the tune of music and the verse of poetry. To them, beyond the tune and verse is—nothing. To me, beyond the tune and verse is—all.'

'I did not know you played.'

‘I never play here. I don’t learn, you know. I had some lessons in harmony from Walter MacFarren when I first came, and then I went on by myself. It is a beautiful study ; satisfying, and perfectly beautiful. It seems to me like the poetry of mathematics. Don’t let us speak any more of these things,’ she added, suddenly and quickly. ‘Let us talk of something else.’

‘But why ? I like to hear you talk about them.’

‘No ! no !’ she said, ‘speak of something else ; something calm and quiet. How long are you going to favour Miss Grimshaw with your presence ? Do you know ?’

‘About three years, I believe. And you ?’

‘I don’t know at all,’ she answered hastily. ‘It depends entirely upon myself. I have no mother, you know. She died when I was six months old. I like to be here. At least, I would just at present rather be here than anywhere else. But never mind this. Tell me about yourself.’

‘What about myself?’

‘Anything. Everything. Why you came here. All your life till the time you came. All you can think of.’

I began at once, narrating the principal events of my childhood, and many things forgotten now, for ever.

I shall never forget the sympathy she displayed for me during the recital of my girlish troubles and griefs. I shall never forget the kind grasp of her hand, growing firmer as my tale went on.

When I had finished she was silent for a long time, stroking my hair at intervals with a fond caressing movement. We sat quiet till the evening closed in. Then the old nurse entered with the tea, pouring it out for us, and congratulating me gaily on my visitor. We insisted, I remember, upon having the gas put out, and sat by the light of the fire, watching the forms of our school-companions, who were busy at their to-morrow’s lessons in the lighted study in the distance; some

one—for our special delectation no doubt, Marion said—having neglected her duty of putting down the blinds of that apartment. Then we nestled together by the bright fire, talking of many things, now long forgotten. But her quick, eager looks, the flashing of her great eyes, her passionate exclamations, if by chance the conversation turned on a subject to her of more than common interest, I shall never forget. The remembrance of that night, with the fire growing faint and dim as we sat looking into it, till it quietly went out for want of stirring, with her excited voice growing lower with excitement, and her rapid words more rapid, till at length she grew silent with intense feeling, never rises in my mind but it associates itself—why I know not—with the remembrance of another night, years distant from it, with such strange power, that I can scarcely separate in my thoughts — though widely different — the several events of each. The time passed so swiftly that when the old nurse entered, and

scolded us for letting the fire out, and acquainted us with the fact that it was bedtime, it seemed to me as if we had been together but a few moments.

As my new friend rose to go, my Bible, which had been on the chair by my side, fell to the ground. She picked it up and examined it.

‘I suppose you read this regularly, every night and morning?’

‘Yes,’ I said, smiling, ‘every night and morning since I’ve been in the infirmary; that is, since my senses came back to me.’

She stooped and kissed me. ‘What a dear, trusting little thing you are!’ Then, half-sighing, she went quietly away without another word.

I sat thinking of her for a long, long time before I went to bed that night. Then, roused from my reverie by my careful nurse, who always helped me to undress, I retired to rest; not forgetting my prayers, which were



longer than usual, ending them, as I invariably did, with a prayer for my mother.

A prayer for my mother, who—while her child was praying tearfully that she might sleep in peace—was sleeping, quietly and calmly, the sleep that knows no waking!



## CHAPTER IX.

EVERYONE said how calmly I took it, and everyone was right. Outwardly, no sign of the grief and despair that crushed my heart. Not even a relapse of my illness, which, I heard afterwards, Miss Grimshaw considered such a natural thing to expect, that she cited, as an additional proof of my innate hardness of heart, the fact that I did not fall ill again on the spot.

The blow stunned me, numbing my mind, as it were, for many months after ; but producing no immediate effect of bitter cries and tears. Hence, *en suite* of Miss Grimshaw, I was denominated ‘unaffectionate’ and ‘unfeeling’ by the majority of, if not by nearly all, my schoolfellows, while my poor child-heart was breaking.

To enter into details here respecting the death of my mother would be as uninteresting to the reader as painful to myself. Suffice it to say that she died suddenly, and as suddenly was the fact communicated to me. Her brother-in-law wrote a letter to Miss Grimshaw acquainting her with it, and requesting her to break the news to me as gently as possible, as business matters denied him the time necessary either for writing to or seeing me. He went on to say, that for the sake of his first wife, who had been my mother's sister, he should continue to defray the expenses of my education till three years should have expired from the date of my entrance into the college; but at the expiration of that term it would be necessary for me to earn my own livelihood, and I must then hope for no further assistance from him. After giving me the first terrible information, Miss Grimshaw presented me with this letter to read. I read it, and returned it to her without word or comment of any kind. The

absence in it of the least expression of sympathy with, or pity for, either the dead or the living, filled me with such an awful sense of loneliness that there was no room in my heart, for the moment, for any other feeling. Therefore I was silent; and Miss Grimshaw left me in a state of indignation, openly expressing her conviction to me that I was 'the most hardened girl it had ever been her misfortune to meet with.'

I must not forget to mention that I was not made acquainted with the fact of my mother's death till she had been dead many weeks. At the time it took place I was delirious with brain-fever; and on my recovering my reason, Miss Grimshaw, by Dr. Long's advice, delayed informing me of my loss, for fear that a knowledge of it in my then state of health might retard my recovery. So this knowledge had been kept from me; and night after night I had prayed for my dead mother—had prayed for her health and happiness, and that she might soon know the

truth about my error and forgive me the past. Oh! sweet love and forgiveness. Who shall say that she was not near me even as I spoke, causing both to descend upon me!

But I could not feel this at the time. As the days went on, the thought that my mother had died believing the untruths which I had now no doubt Miss Grimshaw had told her concerning me—causing her last words to me to be those of grief and reproach—filled me with a pain such as I had never felt before. It was long before the thought that she now *knew everything*, and blamed me no longer, came to me as a consoler; but when it did come, it brought with it by degrees such peace and comfort, that at length I felt as calm and free from grief as if she were still on earth to love and guide me. It was not till the first novelty of this feeling had worn off that I began to realise how strong and well I was getting, and that in all probability I had but a short time longer of idleness before me. And such was really the case.

About three weeks after that fatal letter had been put into my hand, I received a visit from Miss Thomson, the head-governess. She brought an intimation from Miss Grimshaw that that lady expected me to resume my duties the following morning. I employed the last evening of my stay in the infirmary in inditing and writing a long letter to my uncle—being the first and last I ever wrote to him—in which I asked particulars of my mother's death, and thanked him for his liberality to me. Whether this letter ever reached him I know not. I know that I placed it in the letter-box with my own hands—unsealed, according to rule—on the next general letter-day. I also know that I never received a reply to it.

It was a bright and beautiful morning in early spring when I left my sick room, and a fresh sense of life and hope came over me when I felt the sweet air on my face. My companions welcomed me with kind nods and smiles ; but, on my part, there was only

one I cared to see, and her I had seen only a day or two previously. She had been with me nearly every evening since I had heard of my mother's death ; seldom speaking to me, only holding my hand, and showing in every silent way her sympathy and affection for me. How little then we either of us thought what urgent need for sympathy and love between us the future had in store !

As I went into the study she came up to me, and whispered a few words of welcome ; but while she was speaking a bell rang, which, signalling me to my music-room, separated us at once. I got through the day well, and felt little the worse for my work ; the restored privilege of communication with my companions, which had been acceded to me by Miss Grimshaw, through the medium of Miss Thomson, probably assisting to bring about this desirable result.

Days and weeks passed by, and beyond a general sense of weariness and fatigue, which attacked me about the third day after

first resuming my duties, I experienced no ill effects from my recent indisposition and my confined sedentary life. But this same feeling of weariness never afterwards wholly left me during my residence at the college. It seemed with me sometimes even in my sleep. At first I attributed it solely to weakness incidental on my protracted illness, but its long continuance induced me at last to put it down to what latterly was, no doubt, its only cause, viz., want of fresh air, sufficient outdoor exercise, and mental rest—three requisites to good health, to which I was almost an absolute stranger during my stay with Miss Grimshaw. With the exception of the few weeks I spent in the infirmary, from the date of my entrance into the college to the day of my leaving it, I led an uninterrupted life of toil, with little or no amelioration of my burden. Even in the vacations, the extra care of those pupils who remained devolving upon me, I had no leisure. If anything, my duties were harder and more



numerous than during term time. The pleasures of most other girls of my age in my position were unknown to me ; heard of occasionally, but never experienced. For me there were no intervals of rest and happiness. It became such a natural thing at last for 'that poor Polly Browne' to stay the holidays that my more fortunate companions came to look upon it as an institution ; and I believe had it suddenly happened that some other roof had given me shelter for a time, it would have been resented, at all events by Miss Grimshaw, as an infraction of some unpublished rule. When the end of the term arrived, all the laughing faces would cluster around me, eager voices telling of expected pleasures in joyful homes ; while I, homeless and desolate, heard with inexpressible hopelessness of the happiness which would be mine no more. At such times the sweet glimpses of the long-past days seemed so terrible to me that I shrank from them, as though they were in reality the mocking,

haunting spectres which they seemed to me to be. At such times some long-forgotten sentence which had fallen from my mother's lips, having reference perhaps to some household care or pleasure, some long-forgotten scene, in which the tiny child I once had been had borne a part, would revive in my memory, would sound in my ears, would be printed on my mind with terrible strength and clearness, never to be hushed or erased for days. At such times I would steal away to my room, and pray earnestly that the hour might soon come when my home might be an eternal one, where no unhappiness could ever come. At such times, when the laughing faces had disappeared, I experienced a kind of recklessness of feeling, which rendered me utterly indifferent to what might happen, causing me to perform my duties with a sort of listless apathy, which would draw down upon me the fierce indignation of Miss Grimshaw, but to which she would at length give in, as to something it was entirely out of her power

to subdue, as truly it was. On the return of my companions my serenity would come back, and continue till they were again about to leave. Whether she had heard of these fits or not I never knew, but at the end of the summer term, during my second year at the college, Marion Launceston one day suddenly announced to me her intention of not leaving for the vacation.

‘What! Do you mean to stay here?’ I exclaimed.

‘Yes. Why not?’

‘But why in the world should you? I thought your papa had arranged for you to go to Hastings with the Glenns.’

‘Did you indeed? Well, I’m not going, you see. Now, it’s of no use talking,’ as I was about to speak, ‘because it’s all settled. I can’t very conveniently invite you to spend your holidays in my society *out* of the college, so I have arranged to pass the time with you *in* it. Does the idea please you?’

‘ Oh ! Marion. But I can’t bear that you should lose your liberty for my sake.’

‘ Don’t talk so absurdly. Lose my liberty indeed ! I go where I like and I stay where I like, and for the present I like to stay here ; so that can’t be losing my liberty.’

‘ But what will your papa say ?’

‘ His pleasure is mine. He never opposes my wishes. I seldom see him, you know, in the holidays. If I went to Hastings he would not be there. The fact is, Mary,’ she went on in a grave tone, ‘ papa has a strange mixture of feeling for me. He’s unhappy when I am with him, because I remind him of my mother—and he’s unhappy when I’m not with him, because then he has no one to remind him of her. At least, that is *his* explanation. Can you understand such a state of feeling ?’

‘ Partly,’ I said.

‘ Well, *I* can’t. However, you see, it cannot matter really much to him what I please to do with myself. He is very kind,

though,' she added, sighing. 'When he saw I did not wish to go to Hastings, he offered to take me to the Continent with him—he started last night; but I knew *he* did not want me much, and *you* wanted me very much indeed; so I elected to stay here.'

'How sorry I am!'

'No, you're not. You're very glad. It's a sad thing to get into the habit of telling untruths. It *is* an untruth, and I won't be contradicted!'

So she stayed. They were the happiest days I had spent since my father's death. With her usual cleverness, my friend arranged my vacation duties for me in such a methodical manner that they appeared lighter to me; and those she *could* ease by sharing with me—which were few indeed—she did. But still the weary tired feeling, to which I had now become thoroughly accustomed, never left me during my waking hours, even for a moment.

I learnt more of my dear helpmate in

those few weeks, than all the past had ever taught me ; the unchecked passion of her wayward nature, changing my admiration at times into a feeling of awe—not unmixed with a vague dread—though of what, I knew not. There was an indefiniteness about her ideas, or rather, perhaps, in her mode of expressing them, which mystified me so much that I seldom seemed able to comprehend fully what she really thought or meant. But I know that at the end of the month we spent together, I was more than ever convinced that she was a most extraordinary and remarkable girl, and that such must be the opinion of all who knew, or would ever know her, as well as I did.

However, those happy weeks came at last to an end, and the dull routine of school-life again commenced.

## CHAPTER X.

THE dull routine of school-life again commenced—to continue, alas! for many dreary months; months to me of the same old pain and weariness, no pleasure in them, and no hope.

I have often thought since, as indeed I thought vaguely at the time, what an extraordinary system of education was that pursued at Victoria College. I was not alone, either, in my opinion on the subject. Marion Launceston had much the same ideas as myself respecting it, though no doubt her perceptions were clearer and more defined than mine. The first grand rule of this system appeared to be, to cram as much mixed knowledge into the immature human brain as it was capable of holding. The



second, that, granting that information of any kind is desirable, it is not of the slightest importance that it should be in any case adapted to the sex, age, or capacity of its receiver. There were other points in it equally peculiar and irrational, but these two were the most prominent.

‘You are quite right, Mary,’ said my friend to me one evening when we were seated in the study, waiting for Miss Grimshaw’s entrance to prayers, which for some reason or other was delayed: ‘You are quite right. It is all wrong, all wrong entirely. The poor girls here, as you say, not only get as a rule so overworked, that their senses grow confused and their health indifferent, but in most instances the subjects they study are not adapted to their capacity or class of mind. This is how the mistake ends. A girl with average, or rather *mediocre* ability, has rather less power of general comprehension when her education is “completed,” than she would have had at the same age if she

had never been troubled with such so-called "education" at all ; while, on the other hand, one with more than average capacity frequently develops into a sort of man-minded woman ; a being,' she went on laughing, 'not really capable of doing a man's work, but with a desire to do it ; and worse still, with a total inaptitude for, a thorough ignorance of, and too often a strong distaste for, the humbler duties of a woman's life. Like me, for instance.'

'No! Not like you, Marion. You would always be glad to do your duty, whatever it might be.'

'My dear,' she said, laughing, 'if my duty were to take the form of mending socks and shirts, making puddings and pies, superintending a maid-of-all-work, or cooking a steak and potatoes in a case of emergency, I not only shouldn't be glad to do it, but the probability is I shouldn't attempt to do it; and I'm only one of a class, you know. What can you expect of young ladies who

have only studied such simple subjects as natural philosophy, algebra, mathematics, &c. ?’

‘ Oh, Marion ! you are making fun.’

‘ I’m not, indeed.’

‘ But do you think that girls brought up here can never turn out well ?’

‘ Oh, yes. I suppose they not only can, but actually do, sometimes. But such an exception to the two results I have spoken of, as a girl really developing into a clever *womanly-minded* woman, is rare indeed. There is, of course, such a case now and then, but very, very seldom.’

‘ Then you think the college is all wrong, altogether ?’

‘ That’s rather sweeping, Miss Mary ; I don’t think I said that. Now listen to the words of wisdom ! Of course no system of education can be adapted to all minds, but least of all, I should say, can this system of Miss Grimshaw’s : for it pre-supposes the possession by its recipients of a kind of

sweeping perception, as powerful and acute as comprehensive—a sort of chewing-the-cud ability, if I may so call it—a capacity for separating the various kinds of knowledge forced in confusion upon the brain, into certain distinct facts to be ruminated upon at leisure, that they may bring forth good fruit in the end. Now, not one girl in five hundred possesses this perception and ability, and, therefore, for the four hundred and ninety-nine this system rather decreases than helps to strengthen any natural intellectual power.'

'Then you wouldn't have all girls taught in the same way? Or to do the same thing? Or to attempt the same quantity of study in proportion to——'

'Of course not,' she interrupted, 'any more than I would have all animals trained to the same work. It would be ridiculous to harness a dog to a heavy carriage, and try to compel the poor creature to draw it; it would be absurd to endeavour to teach a horse to follow his master up and down stairs, all over a

house ; yet either attempt would scarcely be more senseless than the attempt to force a girl of one class of intellect into performing the tasks fitted only for a girl of another class of intellect.'

'Yes. But I don't exactly see how it is all to be remedied.'

'Well, one great reform in the matter would be effected by beginning things at the beginning, if I may so express it. Now, we will take a young girl coming here to be educated. Say she is twelve years of age, can read tolerably, write a little, and has otherwise an imperfect knowledge of the rudiments of the general subjects of study. You know what is at once done with this unhappy child. With no reference whatever to the amount or class of knowledge she has already acquired, or is supposed to have acquired, she is put into a certain form, consisting of children of about her own age, all of various ability and in different stages of education. She is probably plunged at once—say, for example,

into the civil wars of Charles the First ; the wars of the first Roman triumvirate ; the wars of the Roses ; the wars of the Athenians and Spartans ; the wars of the Philistines and Israelites ; the minute geography of Singapore ; the mysteries of syntax and prosody ; natural philosophy ; the use of the globes. All these subjects, to say nothing of a dozen others, she is crammed with, constantly, first a dose of one, and then of another. And this, you must remember, when, in many instances, she has never, before joining the class, even heard the names of the people who are fighting, scarcely knows the general divisions of the world, or the parts of speech, or that a heavy weight can be lifted in any other way than by taking it up in the hands. Can you wonder that, in a few months' time, she becomes what most of the girls here are, dull and unintelligent, with no clear ideas or reliable information on any one subject ?'

' But what would you do with them, then?'

‘Why, this is what I’d do. Whatever they had in hand to study, I’d make them, as I said before, begin at the beginning; or, if they really knew a little thoroughly of the subject, they should begin at the point where their thorough knowledge ceased. I should then go on gradually, connecting each lesson and event with the last to which attention had been directed; thus making the acquisition of knowledge a source of interest, not trouble, to them. I should also teach them but one subject at a time: I mean, one morning, for example, entirely history, the next geography, and so on, instead of making them repeat from memory a variety of short lessons on various subjects; and what I taught them I would teach them, as much as possible, verbally, and so *thoroughly*—however slowly they might learn—that when the class was over the facts inculcated should be as much facts to their minds, and in their memories, as facts in themselves. By pursuing this course, I



should see my pupils gradually getting clear-headed instead of growing dull and obtuse; and not only would this be the case, but they themselves, in a very short period, would be able by a slight effort to gain ten times the amount of knowledge in a given time that a muddle-headed girl could. In fact such a system as this—of course I mean if worked out in all its details, and properly pursued—would answer a great moral purpose, by training a girl's mind into a distinct perception of things in general, and into a habit of *reasoning*, to which the impulsiveness of her nature is ever an enemy.'

'How did you learn all this, Marion?'

'I didn't learn it, dear. How could I learn it? Anyone could see it who took the trouble to think. But people don't take the trouble to think. Children must be educated, and parents go about the matter with their eyes shut. With the idea, perhaps, that something has been deficient in their own education, and that that something

will be remedied in that of their children, because, as they vaguely remark, "Education is not what it was;" or with a laudable desire that their daughters in the matter of education shall have the best article that money can buy; they send them to what are called high-class schools, more or less expensive (the most expensive being in almost every instance considered the most desirable), merely to have their brains confused, and their perception dulled. It never enters the minds of such people even to endeavour to find out whether their children are receiving those benefits which they are paying heavy sums of money in order that they shall receive. They take it all on trust. They would not think of patronising a tradesman without feeling satisfied as to the genuineness and first-class quality of his goods, yet in this most important matter of education they place a blind and senseless faith in a person of another class, without considering for one moment what the con-

sequences must be should such confidence prove to be misplaced, as in so very many instances it is.'

'Even I, Marion, know that a great many people teach who are not qualified to do so.'

'My dear, teaching is a great art. The power of effectually imparting knowledge to others is an accomplishment that can no more be acquired indiscriminately by everybody than can a first-class execution as a pianist, artist, &c. And yet any girl thinks she can perform the duties of a governess if she possesses the ability to read her own language, and spell and write it passably. Young women nowadays set up schools, and undertake the duties of teachers who are, in reality, in as great need of education themselves as the unfortunate children entrusted to their care. I think that there ought not only to be institutions especially dedicated to the examination of women desirous of engaging in tuition, but also

that no woman should be permitted to *teach at all* without a registered certificate of her competency. Indeed I think that people who are fitting themselves for the task of teaching *ought to be taught how to teach*. This, however, is perhaps slightly Utopian. Don't you see that if girls were not permitted to teach without possessing these certificates, great good would be effected in more than one way? In the first place, the number of governesses by profession in England would be about one-twentieth of what it now is; and, in consequence, they would be as a class better paid and treated more in accordance with their true position than is at present the case. And, secondly, hundreds of poor girls who now for the sake of the superior social standing it affords elect to gain their livelihood by tuition, receiving in many instances, when engaged in families or schools, less than the wages of a superior servant (though most probably much more than they are really worth as instructresses),

would thankfully accept employment more suited to their ability and acquirements, and would ultimately reap the benefit of such a course in an improved income, greater liberty of action, and comparative freedom from anxiety. I suppose Parliament is too grand and busy to trouble about this kind of thing, but certainly something ought to be done to remedy the present state of affairs—at least so it seems to my girl's apprehension. You see, Mary, it strikes at the very root of things. If all middle-class girls were properly and thoroughly educated, the next generation of middle-class women would be very different from the present frivolous one; and, in most instances, these women, in their turn, would see that their children had the same advantages which they had themselves enjoyed. Look, besides, what an incalculable benefit it is to boys to have an intelligent, thorough-minded, clear-headed mother! I really do think,' continued my friend, laughing, 'that if I had the management of

it all, the third generation from this would, mainly through the difference between its mothers and its great-grandmothers, be a race of giants, like the men of old—I don't mean physical giants, you know, but mental.'

'Time will do wonders, Marion. Who knows what reforms may take place in everything during the next fifty years?'

'Yes,' she said; 'time works wonders, as you say. In this, as in so many other things, Mary, we must be content to wait.'

'I wish such good days for poor governesses would come in my time,' I said, 'such days as you have been imagining, Marion. I have nothing to look forward to. I am one of the common ones. I know a little bit here and there, and shall, I dare say, at my luckiest when I leave here, get 30*l.* a year and my board and lodging for the rest of my life.'

'Oh!' she said gaily, 'but I have a prince in store for you. You will not always be a governess. He'll come when you are least



expecting him, and clothe your life with beauty, and turn the dark spots into brightest gold.'

Oh my dear, dear friend! The tenderness and the sweetness of your face, can I ever forget!

'Not for me, Marion,' I said, smiling back to her—'not for me. This happiness will be for you. I shall come and stay with you, and be the old maiden aunt whom everyone laughs at and everyone loves, and I shall die in your arms' (oh, false, strange words, whose error seemed then to me like distant truth)—when my hair is white, and you too are old, but still beautiful,' I added, looking at her fondly. 'You must always be beautiful—in that you can never change.'

'Never's a long day,' she said gaily. 'But do I really look so well, Mary? I don't mean "beautiful," you know, that is nonsense, but well and strong?'

'You look the picture of health—and happiness too, I was going to say.'



‘Well, I *am* happy. I manage to amuse myself here in some way. And I always *feel* well, whatever I look. You see I don’t overwork myself, as so many here are compelled to do.’

‘But you seem always reading and studying.’

‘Yes; but I don’t do more than is good for me—that’s the point. I take care of that. A great part of the evil of Miss Grimshaw’s system consists in the “quantity” of her education, if I may so call it. She crams her pupils with more than they can digest. They could not manage it even if the quality was as superior as it is inferior. Do you see how tired and languid most of the girls here look? You look so yourself, poor child; you always look so, though in your case it is not the result of too much study, but of too much teaching. Before the day is over you all seem half dead, and when you rise in the morning you’re not much better. All the life and spirit is crushed out

of you. This is nothing but the result of unceasing mental effort, which, of itself, will injure permanently the strongest constitution. Don't you remember what Mr. Thompson said last Wednesday in his lecture on "Health"?'

'I do, now you speak of it.'

'Well, you may be sure he was right. I remember a girl who was here before you came—Alice Brownsmith. She went home ill, and died in a few days. Naturally delicate, the amount of study she had to undertake daily produced some affection of the brain. She died, Mary—poor girl—and so young to die! She was just fifteen. I remember her quite well. She was always in trouble with her lessons and classes, and came to me often to help her; but, in spite of all that I could do for her, she seldom succeeded in completing her tasks. I've seen her night after night sitting crying over her books, with her face buried in her hands. Some of the girls would make fun of her, and some would

pity her ; but as she was not the only one who "watered her lessons," as the girls call it, no one took much notice of her troubles till she had to be sent home ill.'

'What did Miss Grimshaw say to that?'

'Nothing before *us*, you may be sure ; but that the governesses and the girls had plenty to say on the quiet, I need not tell you. How we found out she was dead I don't know, but we got hold of it somehow, and then the opinion of the college was expressed pretty freely. Everyone said she had been simply "worked to death."'

'How shocking !' I exclaimed.

'You may well say so. It would have done Miss Grimshaw good to have heard all that was said in detail. But she only got the echoes of it, you see, and they did not make much impression on her.'

'I suppose not. It would take a great deal to make an impression on *her* heart.'

'You are quite right. But to give her her due, I have no doubt that she was much

troubled about this affair. You see, it's the system that's wrong. She pursues it because it's a money-getting one, and also because it entails little trouble. Very likely, before that poor girl's death, she never imagined that over-cramming *could* do harm. This is how it is, you see. This is a large establishment, and the conductress of it considers it necessary to have a certain code of rules on the subject of education. These rules are applied indiscriminately to all its student inmates. *They must be kept.* One is :— "Each class has its work, which *must* be performed." Now, the consequence of the enforcing of this especial rule was poor Alice Brownsmith's death. Had Miss Grimshaw foreseen this consequence, she would doubtless have relaxed the rule ; but, unfortunately, she did not foresee it.'

'But there's the same rule now, Marion.'

'Yes. After this unhappy affair it was modified, but now it is as stringent as ever again ; and I don't suppose that anything but

another death, or something else equally lamentable happening in consequence of its enforcement, would induce Miss Grimshaw to relax it again, however slightly.'

'It's very dreadful,' I said.

She was silent for a few moments, then her eyes falling on a little girl seated near us, she turned to me suddenly.

'Do you see that child, Mary?—the little one with the light hair?'

'The one with the book?—yes. I've been watching her, on and off, for some time.'

'Well, Miss Grimshaw cites her as a specimen of the success of her plan of education. Do you know her at all?'

'No. She is not among my pupils. I have often noticed, but never spoken to her.'

'Amy, come here.'

She had to speak three times before the little head was raised. Then the grave, thoughtful face, so old-looking and unchild-like that, in my first close observation of it, it startled and distressed me, was turned towards

us for a moment, then back again to the book with a deprecating gesture.

Marion rose and went to her.

‘Put away your book, Amy, and come and talk to me a little. You mustn’t have books, you know, when it’s after prayer-time. It’s against rules.’

‘Yes, but I don’t know it perfectly.’

‘Never mind. Put it away, dear, when I tell you.’

The child obeyed now (but with a tiny sigh), fondling the hand which had taken hers, and looking up into the beautiful face with a loving trustful expression on her own. As Marion led her towards me I noticed the little creature’s large grey eyes had a painfully intense and intelligent look.

‘Amy,’ said my friend, placing the child on her knee, and clasping her arms caressingly round the slight figure, ‘haven’t you a little time to spare for me, Amy? What were you so busy about?’

‘I wasn’t very busy,’ she answered; ‘only

I can't learn those pages and pages for the French class. It's so hard, and my head aches so, and I'm such a little thing.' She looked at me earnestly as she spoke.

'Yes,' I said, 'you're a very little thing. How old are you, dear?'

'I'm just turned nine.'

'As old as that,' I said. 'You don't look so.'

She smiled faintly. 'No, but I'm turned nine—just turned, am I not, Marion?'

The quaint familiarity with which she addressed one so much older than herself made me laugh.

'Why do you laugh?' she exclaimed quickly, glancing at me with a sharp, eager look, not giving time for her other question to be answered. Then in the same breath she tried to slip away from the kind arms which, for all her struggling, only held her closer.

'Do let me go and finish learning my class, dear. Miss Grimshaw won't be in yet. Oh! my head aches so!'



‘No; you’re not going,’ said Marion. Then putting her hand hastily on the child’s forehead, ‘Why, it’s burning, Amy!’

‘Yes, I’m so tired; but do let me go, you dear darling,’ said the quaint little voice.

‘No,’ I say. ‘I want you to talk to this young lady here.’

‘I don’t want to talk to her,’ she replied, looking at me doubtingly; ‘she was laughing at me just now.’

‘I didn’t mean to laugh, Amy,’ I said, ‘and am very sorry that I did so. Won’t you forgive me?’

‘Oh yes. I don’t mind.’ This with a little sigh and another quick glance towards me.

‘What makes you so tired, dear?’ I asked.

‘I don’t know,’ she replied hesitatingly. ‘I’ve so many lessons to do. Perhaps it’s that.’

‘Do you like learning lessons, Amy?’

‘Yes—No—sometimes I do. You see

papa says he wants me to be clever—and I want to be clever too—but sometimes when I'm very tired, as tired as I am to-night, and my head aches so, I only wish one thing, and that is,' she went on, with her little lip trembling, 'and that is that I could be with mamma.'

'And where is that, Amy?'

She gave a sudden cry, threw her arms round Marion's neck, and burst into passionate tears. I noticed now, for the first time, the deep mourning dress she wore. I glanced at Marion. There was such a curious expression on her face that without speaking to her, I turned again to the child with a choking sensation in my throat.

'Amy, dear, don't cry like this,' I said. 'Hush, darling! Dry your eyes and speak to me.'

'It's only for a little while,' she said; 'it's only for a little while; I shall leave off in a minute. I shouldn't mind, only I'm so tired—so very dreadfully tired.'

We sat still without speaking, till the quick sobs grew less and less, and at last ceased altogether. Then my friend quietly raised the poor little face, and kissed it once, earnestly. The child returned her caress, and kissing me too, without raising her eyes, slipped away from us, and in a moment was again seated at her book, studying as if her life depended upon the effort, instead of, as was possibly the case, on the discontinuance of such efforts. Marion turned to me.

‘That, by way of illustration,’ she said quietly. ‘Now, we’ll talk of something else.’

I often think now, how long those days seemed to me in passing—how short when passed. At the end of the second year of my stay at the college, an event of great importance to me happened. Marion Launceston left. The blow—for it was a blow to me—came suddenly and unexpectedly. Her father returned to England expressly for the purpose of taking her abroad with him, acting

upon an idea he had conceived that it was necessary for her to 'see the world,' as he termed it. He wished her to accompany him on a long foreign tour. His letter on the subject arrived one autumn morning, and the next afternoon he called and took his daughter away with him. I had scarcely time to say to her one word of parting—though Miss Grimshaw relaxed rules on the occasion so far as to allow half-an-hour's recess for the purpose of enabling us all to wish her good-bye. As I bade her a hurried farewell, I put into her hands a small bible which my poor mother had given me on my sixth birthday. I felt that I *must* give her something that I valued, and I gave her this willingly, though it caused me intense pain to part with it. She took it without remark of any kind.

Often since then have I seen her in my dreams as she stood in the study that afternoon, the warm autumn sun shining on her face, the tearful eyes gazing at her, and the

little children clinging to her dress, unwilling to believe that she was really going to leave them, their 'dear, kind Marion,' they said, their 'dear, loving, school-mamma.'

'This is the purest kind of love, Mary, is it not?' she said, smiling as she kissed the upturned faces—'the love of little children.'

So have I often seen her in my dreams! Never, O dear sister—with any stain upon thy sweet womanhood, always with that pure love encircling thee, the love of little children, next in purity and holiness to the love of the angels!

She was gone! and all lamented for her as for a friend they would never see again. For myself, I simply felt as though death had once more struck at all that was dear to me, making my future life a contest that must be fought alone!

## CHAPTER XI.

AFTER Marion's departure, nothing happened to break the dull monotony of my life at the college. Week after week, month after month, I continued in the same dreary round of duty, growing each day more careless of my fate as the end drew near. I knew that at the expiration of the three years, during which my uncle had promised to defray my educational expenses, I should probably have to find another home, but how or where to seek for it I knew not. The thought occasionally would cross my mind that I ought to be doing something, that I ought to be endeavouring to secure for myself some asylum for the future, but still the days went on, and I did nothing. The last term of the three years was already far advanced, before I

seemed, as it were, to wake up thoroughly, and realise the necessity for early action. But how was I to commence operations? I actually had not an idea. There was no time now for me to obtain advice from Marion Launceston, for my last letters, addressed to her at some post-office in Italy, had evidently failed to reach her hands; as but a fortnight previously an epistle from her had been received by me, bearing no fresh address to which I might write (evidently there had been some mistake in the former one), in which she complained of my not having answered her last two letters. In several previous epistles she had questioned me as to my future prospects and intentions, offering to assist me in any way possible, urging me to decide upon some course of action without delay, as by so doing I should have more time for endeavouring to carry my plans into effect. I had taken no notice of her remarks, neither realising nor caring to realise the sound common sense they contained. Won-



dering, probably, at first, at my silence on the subject, and at length, doubtless, attributing it to the morbid apathy of which in reality it was only too truly the result, she had at last offered me, in her own and her father's name, a home with herself till I should meet with some engagement. This I had refused at once—and decidedly. My pride revolted at it ; the acceptance would have seemed to me like the acceptance given to charity by dishonourable poverty ; and, in the tone of my reply, I had doubtless betrayed the, in many respects, unworthy feelings which influenced my refusal. I judge this from the absence in my friend's future letters of any immediate reference to the subject upon which she had so strongly dwelt in former ones. She merely, in the epistle I received from her after declining her invitation, accepted my refusal kindly, and made no farther remark. This had occurred some three months back, and now, roused at length from my dullness and indifference, I yearned not only for the

advice, but also the help which I could no longer command ; though, probably, had I known for certain where a letter would have reached my friend at once, the same false pride which had previously actuated me would again have stepped in, and prevented me from begging that which, a short time before, it had prompted me so ungraciously to refuse. Now, in my ignorance and inexperience, I reaped the bitter fruits of my error, and though far from thoroughly repenting it, still felt for a moment its hollowness and evil.

But I had no leisure for weeping over the mistaken past, even had I wished for that luxury. Something must be done, and quickly too. Should I speak to Miss Grimshaw ? My heart failed me at the thought of being the first of the two to introduce the dreaded subject, and yet it was evident that she did not intend to be so, or why had she so long delayed the carrying her intentions into effect ? As I reflected, it became clear to me from my knowledge of her cha-

racter, that the longer I put off speaking to her, the less chance would there be of arranging the future amicably. It would not be wise of me, in any case, to quarrel with her; so I screwed up my courage and resolved to 'ventilate' the subject at once. When I had succeeded in making this bold resolution, it wanted but three weeks to the end of the term.

Once thoroughly decided, I started with as little delay as possible. One evening (after prayers), it being one of Miss Grimshaw's 'reception-nights,' as we called them—that is, those on which she sent for, one by one, the unfortunates with whom she found it necessary to 'speak,' I braced up my nerves, and requested one of these said unfortunates (who was too much terrified at her own coming struggle to wonder much at my hardihood and audacity in seeking to obtain that, the prospect of which filled her individually with so much horror), to beg an audience for me.

‘Very well,’ said my impromptu *confidante*, ‘I’ll *ask* her. She’ll think you simply mad, as *I* do. But I’ll *ask* her. I only wish I could persuade her to accept your presence instead of mine ; that’s all.’

In spite of my own uneasiness I could not help laughing at the poor girl’s earnestness.

‘Ah! you don’t know what it is,’ she continued ; ‘there’s scarcely a reception-night but what I’m one of the party. I shouldn’t mind so much if she would tell you what you’d done in a Christian manner, but she doesn’t. She gets you down there, and glares at you like a fiend, till your very flesh seems as if it would crawl off your bones. As for you, you’ve forgotten what it is by this time I should think. You’ve never been down since the noise about opening your letter, have you?’

‘No, never.’

‘You got it all at once, I suppose, and a nice time you had of it, quite enough to last you a couple of years or so. I wouldn’t

have gone through it for something. I dare say, as I said before, you hardly remember now what an "interview" is like, so want to try again. Well, I'll *ask* her. There comes Emily Green. I'm next. Off I go, and good luck to me !'

She disappeared at once, and in a short time returned, looking very hot and uncomfortable. She did not wait to tell me her own experience, but simply informed me I was to go down to Miss Grimshaw immediately. "'Miss Browne is to come down without delay.'" These were her very words,' said my friend ; 'she's as inquisitive as anybody ; she's dying to hear what you've got to say. I know her.'

'She won't have to wait long,' I exclaimed, as with the courage of desperation I hastily left the study and made my way to the drawing-room. I entered that chamber of horrors with much the same dread and terror as on the last occasion ; though my feelings were slightly modified by age and

experience, probably also by the knowledge that the enemy was not in reality so powerful as my more youthful imagination had pictured her. As I advanced into the room, I saw she was seated at the same table, and in precisely the same position as on the last occasion of my entrance into it—only the table was not now covered with letters as it had been then. I also remarked with some degree of discomfiture, as if he were an enemy in ambush, or a cannon in reserve, that Mr. Harrop was also seated in *his* old place, with his eyes fixed on me, as though noting my growth and taking stock of my general appearance. I felt very uncomfortable, but without waiting to consider, which would probably have entailed the loss of all self-command, I advanced boldly to the table and spoke first.

‘Miss Grimshaw,’ I said, dashing into my speech at once; ‘I am sorry to trouble you, but I wished to speak to you for a few moments. It is respecting my future move-

ments. I mean when I shall have left the college.' Here I stopped dead. My eloquence was exhausted.

'Well, Miss Browne,' she answered in a dry, hard tone, 'I am here, anxious and *waiting*;' she accented the last word—'anxious and *waiting* to hear what you have to say.'

I gathered courage, and went on as connectedly as I could.

'Miss Grimshaw,' I said, 'my time with you will expire at the end of this term, and I am desirous, by some means or other, to place myself in an independent position. I have come to ask you, as you are the only person to whom I can apply, what steps I had better take to forward my wishes.'

I paused; but as she made no answer, only still looked at me with the cold, stern expression to which I was accustomed, though with her lips a trifle more compressed than usual, I went on.

'I think I could take an engagement as nursery governess, or thorough governess to



young children, or junior teacher in a school. I am willing to do anything in my power to secure to myself independence and a home. I shall be truly glad, Miss Grimshaw, if you will advise me as to the means it will be best for me to adopt in order to accomplish my desire.'

Still no immediate answer. Then, after keeping her eyes fixed on me steadily for a few moments longer in perfect silence, she turned round suddenly, facing Mr. Harrop, with a gesture of passion which startled me.

That gentleman was evidently more accustomed to her varying moods than myself, for he did not appear to be at all surprised at her conduct. In fact, he did not seem to notice her movement, though I felt certain he saw it, till she actually spoke. Then he turned his eyes towards her for a moment (he had never previously ceased to watch me since my entrance into the room), and then looked straight before him, tapping the carpet with his foot.

‘Mr. Harrop,’ she said, ‘you hear what this young person has said. This is but another instance of the ingratitude I meet with continually.’

He bowed his head slowly, still looking straight before him (not at her for an instant), as though in acknowledgment of the truth of her words ; but his eyebrows were raised, and his mouth set with such an inexplicable expression, that I wondered at him almost more than I did at Miss Grimshaw. Between the two of them, I was too much surprised to speak myself, and after a pause of some moments’ duration my instructress went on without interruption.

‘For the last three years,’ she said, still addressing herself to Mr. Harrop, ‘I have acted towards this most ungrateful girl the part of a mother. She came to me in ill-health—ignorant and uncouth. She has been restored to strength at my expense, fed at my table, educated under my superintendence ; her mind has been formed, and her

general tone, if I may so call it, elevated by continual contact with her superiors ; and now, having obtained all she imagines she can obtain from continued residence here, she is willing—nay, even anxious—to break every tie——’

‘Miss Grimshaw,’ I interrupted, striking at the root of the matter at once—only realising for the moment that she spoke of me as though I had been dependent on her charity—‘Miss Grimshaw,’ I said, ‘I have received no advantage under your roof for which you have not had an equivalent.’

‘Miserable money!’ she said ; ‘miserable money! Will that compensate me for the ingratitude I meet with everywhere? I nourish serpents in my bosom to sting me. Those to whom I devote the best energies of my life, fly from me the first opportunity, as though the tender love I had bestowed upon them had turned to gall and poison.’

‘Miss Grimshaw,’ I said, now for the first time fully realising her meaning ; ‘I did not

know that you wished me to stay here. I assure you most earnestly that I had no idea you wished me to stay.'

Her plan was beginning to work, as no doubt it had done in many former instances.

'I have no desire to leave the college,' I went on, for in spite of her singular way of expressing it, her emotion had seemed to me so genuine that I really began to feel as guilty as she had painted me. 'I have no wish to leave you. I am willing to remain here. With regard to the remark I made, I—I—did not so much mean the money paid to you, as—as—the services rendered to you by me. Surely the two combined form an equivalent for any advantages I have received in your establishment. I should be glad——'

'She has no desire to leave me,' she broke in. 'She is willing to stay here. You hear her, Mr. Harrop. And in the face of this she has come to ask me the best means

to adopt to enable her to earn her living elsewhere.'

She never addressed herself to me, personally. It had a most irritating effect upon me, making me feel as if she considered me too ungrateful to be spoken to.

'I will stay here, Miss Grimshaw,' I said. 'It is my wish to stay here. When I proposed leaving you, it was because I naturally thought it was your intention that I should do so. I am willing to do as you direct me at any time.'

I felt now as if I had wiped out some of the ingratitude which actually, for the moment, I thought I had showed.

'That is sufficient, child,' she interrupted, as I was about to speak again, still looking away from me; and still warding me off with her raised hand, as she had done all along. 'That is sufficient. I forgive you, and trust I may, in time, forget your offence. Stay at the college, and make it your home. I can bear no more. Go at once.'

I obeyed, leaving the room with my mind in an indescribable tumult and confusion, and with a dim consciousness that I had acted unwisely; and that when I thought things over, I should see my own weakness, and despise myself for it.

When I was safely in bed that night, I *did* think things over, and my reflections were not pleasant. How to account for Miss Grimshaw's apparently changed feelings towards me I knew not. Was there really some genuine affection for me and her other charges hidden beneath the harshness of her demeanour? Or was this display which I had witnessed, with such want of reticence on my own side, only, as I began to suspect, a part of some scheme she had formed to keep me in the college for some purpose of her own?

As I continued to reflect, the extreme probability of the correctness of this latter speculation broke upon my mind with terrible force. I rose in the morning restless

and unhappy, but determined to obtain on the subject, at the first opportunity, the advice of some wiser head than my own.

It happened on the evening of this day, that while waiting for prayers some of my companions who were 'leaving for good,' as they called it, at the end of the term, entered into conversation respecting the change there would be in their lives when they should finally have escaped from their present state of durance. It was not long before my individual self attracted their notice, and my future intentions were enquired into.

'Your time's up too, Polly Browne, isn't it?'

'Yes,' I said, hesitatingly. 'My time's no doubt "up," as you call it.'

'And where are you going to?'

'I don't know that I'm going anywhere,' I answered. 'Miss Grimshaw wishes me to stay here.'

'But you're surely not going to do that?'

broke in a fresh voice.



‘Well, I think I am ; at least I told her I would.’

Some glanced at each other and laughed. Some looked grave ; but no one spoke.

‘Why shouldn’t I stay?’ I asked, my uncomfortable misgivings increasing tenfold. ‘I don’t see why I shouldn’t stay if I like.’

‘Oh ! there’s no reason why you shouldn’t do as you like. No one wants you to go if you prefer remaining, I dare say, Mrs. Upper crust. It’s immaterial to *me* at all events ; for *I’m* off, and thank goodness for it.’

The voice was that of Fanny Harrop. I had held little communication with this young lady since that well-remembered night, now nearly three years distant, when she had favoured me with her graphic sketch of Marion Launceston’s character. I was surprised now at her addressing me, but answered her as sharply as she had spoken.

‘Well,’ I said, ‘it’s nicer for me that

people should not want me to go if I prefer remaining, than it would be if they did not want me to remain when I had to go.'

There was a general laugh at this retort, for my antagonist was no favourite with her schoolfellows, and it seemed probable that few would grieve when she left.

Here the conversation was interrupted by the entrance of Miss Grimshaw for prayers ; but I determined to take the first opportunity of endeavouring to find out why my information had been received by my companions in such a doubtful manner.

I selected for my *confidante* one of my music pupils, older than myself, a quiet, gentle girl, who had been at the college some years. Towards the end of her lesson the next morning, I asked her if she thought I had acted unwisely in telling Miss Grimshaw I would stay at the college ?'

'Have you told her so ?' she replied.

'Yes. Didn't you hear what the girls were saying last night ? You *must* have

heard ; you were close by, and were laughing at Fanny Harrop.

‘Oh, yes, to be sure,’ she said, slowly ; ‘I had forgotten it for the moment.’

‘Well, what do you think ? Do you think it was silly of me to say I would stop ?’

‘I don’t know,’ she answered. ‘Perhaps you had no alternative.’

This was putting it in such a new light, that I felt my heart sink lower than ever.

‘I as good as engaged to stay,’ I said. ‘I don’t know that I really wanted to, but she urged me so strongly not to go. She appeared to think me so ungrateful, and so——’

‘How silly you are !’ interrupted my companion, in a tone of the utmost indignation, ‘as if you didn’t know better than to think it all real. A nice use you’ve made of your three years !’

This was the first and the last time I ever saw this young lady display any strong evidence of excitement.

‘But she seemed so hurt,’ I said. ‘She seemed as if she thought it so unnatural of me even to be willing to go.’

‘Of course she did,’ said my companion, who had by this time recovered her calmness; ‘that’s what she always does. But don’t you really, after all your experience of her, know that she’s most dangerous when she’s affectionate? When I see her drawing in her claws I always know she’s preparing for a spring. When she talked to you in that style, didn’t you have any suspicion that she’d some object in view?’

‘But what is her object?’ I asked, evading the question in my anxiety to get thoroughly to the bottom of it all. ‘It can’t be much to her interest to keep me here.’

‘Not—to—her—interest—to—keep—you—here? Well, some people learn by experience, and some people don’t. I think you’re one of the people that don’t. Now, just listen to me for a moment. You know

Miss —— and Miss —— and Miss ——,’ naming three governesses in the college.

‘Yes, of course I do.’

‘Well, those poor girls have all been victimised in the same way as she means to victimise you. Like you, they had no friends and no means of changing their position ; and, in the first place, by appealing to their feelings (as she has done with *you*, you know) ; and, in the second, by rendering it a most difficult, if not nearly impossible, task for them to secure better appointments, she has contrived to keep them all here working hard for her, at first with no salary, and latterly with barely sufficient to find them in decent clothes. And she’ll never give them any more, and they’ll never get away. It’s a cheap method of getting governesses, my dear ; and she means to get you for one on the same terms, if she doesn’t consider she’s got you already. You ought to be flattered at it too,’ continued my informant with a comical look, ‘for she wouldn’t want you unless she knew you to

be *thorough*. No wooden heads for Lady Grim. You give good music lessons, you know, and understand what you are doing generally (though not out of school, I fear), and she values you at your right price. If you were as silly as—as—well, we'll say as Fanny Harrop, you'd find yourself without fail on the street side of the college doors, next Thursday fortnight, at 2 P.M. sharp. You may be quite sure of that.'

So came the confirmation of my worst and most undefined fears. I felt so wretched that I had not the heart, for the moment, to utter a word.

'She has not made any regular agreement with you, of course?' continued my companion, after a pause.

'Oh, no! Not a word of anything of that sort.'

'No, and she never will—at least till you make her. Unless you resist it, here you'll be ten years hence, with ten pounds a year in your pocket to find you in clothes and

everything else but board and lodging. Take my advice, dear,' said my friend, taking my hand in hers as she spoke, 'if you can possibly manage it, get out of this at the end of the term. Have you no one to help you? Have you no relations at all?'

'I have an uncle,' I said, hesitatingly.

'Well, that's something. They're even better than fathers sometimes. He's sure to do something for you. Couldn't you go and stay with him till you get something? Oh! I forgot, you never go away; he's not in England, I suppose? But surely if you wrote to him he'd help you.'

'He is in England,' I said. 'It was he who put me to school here. But he has not taken any notice of me since my mother died. He said distinctly then that I must look to him for nothing after my time here should be expired. Of course he knows that it is now nearly so; but he has not written to me, and I would rather suffer anything than write to him and beg.'



‘How do you know he has not written to Miss Grimshaw about you?’

‘Do you think she wouldn’t tell me?’

‘Do I think she *would*? Why, my dear, if he has done so, which your own sense must tell you is at all events possible, she has doubtless replied that your welfare shall be her especial care, and that when she has arranged your future suitably, she will let him know.’

‘All this seemed so dreadfully probable that I felt more miserable than ever.

‘If I were you,’ continued my companion, ‘I would write to my uncle, and tell him all. There *is* such a thing as getting a sly letter posted, you know, though it’s a very, very difficult thing to do. I know something about it, and will help you, if you like.’

‘No,’ I interrupted. ‘You are very kind, but I won’t do it. I wouldn’t stoop to write to him for the world. He may have communicated with Miss Grimshaw, as you say—

very possibly he has ; but I can never forget how badly and cruelly he behaved to me when my mother died, and I mean, whatever happens, always to be strictly independent of him.'

'Is he your mother's brother?'

'Oh, no. His first wife was her sister, that is all.'

'Then you've not really any claim on him. Have you?'

'Claim?' I said. 'What claim do I want? If I had any, I would not take advantage of it.'

My companion looked at me as if she could not quite understand my state of mind.

'Poor girl,' she said; 'I'm sure I wish you well out of it; but you're very proud, are you not?'

'I am not proud,' I answered, 'but I cannot bear the thought of troubling with my affairs anyone who would rather have nothing to do with them. I am quite certain

that my uncle does not wish to have any connection with them that he can possibly avoid; consequently, even the thought of making any application to him could never be otherwise than unpleasant to me.'

'I see, dear.' This very doubtfully. 'But there's the bell! I must go. Don't let anyone in the place know what we've been talking about, or I might get into dreadful trouble. We're surrounded by spies, you know.'

'Oh, no; I'm wise enough for that, at all events,' I answered. 'I wouldn't mention it for the world. Thank you very much for your advice and kindness.'

She was gone, and I was left to my own bitter reflections, and the society of a minute child, who had entered as she went.

## CHAPTER XII.

STAY at the college I would not. I made up my mind boldly to that at once. The next thing to decide upon was how to make Miss Grimshaw aware of the alteration in my intentions. Risk the result of another conversation with her I dared not; I felt that if I did so, she would in the end overreach me in some way or other. After some consideration, I decided to address her by letter, which, indeed, in the absence of another interview, seemed my only feasible alternative. 'By adopting this method,' I said to myself, 'I can say what I mean in a ladylike way, without fear of interruption, and she will be compelled to answer me—as I speak—to the point.' I had, even at this

stage of events, still a great opinion of my own wisdom.

The first opportunity I obtained, I wrote to Miss Grimshaw as follows:—

‘ Dear Miss Grimshaw,

I have been reflecting deeply on the subject of our conversation the other evening, and fear I decided hastily, and in the excitement of the moment as to my future course. In fact, no agreement was entered into between us as to the remuneration I was to receive for my services to you, in the event of my remaining at the College in the capacity of governess. Dependent as I am for a livelihood entirely upon my own exertions, it will, whatever my position, be necessary for me in the future to receive an emolument suitable to the nature and extent of the duties I perform. Should the conferring such an emolument be contrary to your intentions, perhaps you will kindly let me know at your earliest convenience, as, what-

ever difficulties might be in my path, I should then be compelled to seek another home, where I might hope, not only to supply present necessities, but also to provide for future contingencies. Trusting, in any case, to the favour of an explicit reply,

I am, dear Miss Grimshaw,

Yours faithfully,

MARY BROWNE.'

This letter, completed after careful study, and not without strong forebodings of evil, which weighed on my mind heavily, in spite of all the reason I could bring to bear against them, was written during the time which we were, once a fortnight, permitted to devote to letter-writing. Fortunately for me, the very day after that upon which I had decided upon the course I would take, happened to be 'scribbling day,' as the girls called it. Hence the fulfilment of my resolution followed quickly upon its formation. The document completed, the next thing on

hand was its transmission to Miss Grimshaw. I would not trust it to the letter-box. She might affect to, or, indeed, might really overlook it. I decided upon another course. I waited till I heard one of the servants going down the stairs, and then, hastily leaving the study, I gave the note into her hands, begging her to take it to Miss Grimshaw at once. This she readily undertook to do, though with a look of surprise at the unusual request.

I waited two anxious days, but no answer. I saw Miss Grimshaw several times, and once she addressed me individually relative to some of my duties, but in her general behaviour towards me she betrayed no knowledge of the note, which I had fully ascertained she had duly received. Another day passed, and another, and another. Still no reply. Utterly at a loss how to act, I determined again to make a *confidante* of the quiet girl whose remarks had induced me to place myself in the position which had led



to my present perplexity. I took the first opportunity of telling her the course I had taken and its results, or rather want of results, begging her advice as to my next step. She was much surprised at my recital.

‘How brave you are! I wouldn’t have dared to do it.’

‘Oh, yes, you would, if you’d had as much at stake as I have. Do you think I intend to submit quietly to being shut up here all my life, like a nun?’

‘It appears not. But she’ll never answer your letter.’

‘And why not, pray?’

Such was my inconsistency that though my own heart had been telling me all along, that without further action on my part, Miss Grimshaw’s silence would last for ever, I felt inclined to resent the utterance of a similar opinion by another person. ‘And why not?’ I said.

‘Why not? Because she won’t.’

‘Because she won’t,’ I repeated, contemp-

tuously. 'That's no reason, "because she won't." What I want to know is—*why* she won't?'

'Well, I don't know *why* she won't,' said my companion, growing perplexed, as though she had a complicated problem to deal with—'I don't know *why* she won't, unless it is *because* she won't. I know no other reason for it.'

'But how do you know she won't?' I asked, impatiently.

'Why, because she *won't*.' This in a most decided tone. 'I've told you so half-a-dozen times.'

Feeling convinced from my experience of my own sex in general, and school-girls in particular, that I should get no farther satisfaction on this branch of the subject, I sat still thinking.

'Now what do you think yourself?' said my friend, after a long pause. 'Do *you* think you'll get an answer? Be truthful now. Do you really think it likely you'll get it?'

‘Well, I can’t say that I do.’

‘Then why are you vexed with me for thinking the same?’ This with a deprecating air that made me laugh in spite of my troubles.

‘I’m not vexed with you,’ I said, ‘only I’m so worried, and you’ll give no reason for thinking Miss Grimshaw will not answer.’

‘What reason have *you*, then, for thinking it?’

‘Well, I fancy that had she intended answering me in any way, she would have done it before this.’

‘Well, perhaps that reason would do for me *now*. It’s a very good one. But I could have told you, at the first, before you sent your letter, that you’d never hear any more of it.’

‘But how could you have told?’

‘Oh, because I *could*, and because you wouldn’t. I could have *told* you you wouldn’t, and you see I should have been right.’

‘I suppose you judge from your knowledge of Miss Grimshaw’s character?’

‘I don’t know. I know nothing about judging and reasoning. I only know that when I think things will turn out in a certain way, they generally do. I don’t know why they do, unless it’s because they do. However, this is not business. What we have to think about is, what you are to do next.’

‘Yes,’ I said; ‘that’s really the question. What am I to do next?’

‘Now, if I were you,’ said my companion, after a little consideration, ‘I should decidedly begin to keep my eyes open.’

There was such a general vagueness in this advice, that I acted upon it immediately.

‘Oh, I don’t mean in that way,’ she said, laughing. ‘I’m speaking metaphorically. I mean, you must begin to look about you.’

‘But how am I to look about?’

‘Well, before I looked about, I should go to Miss Grimshaw and tell her I *meant* to look about.’

‘Go to Miss Grimshaw!’ I exclaimed, aghast at the idea.

‘Yes, of course.’

‘But why?’

‘Why, to let her know that you intend to look about.’

‘And what’s the good of that?’

‘Why, so that she can’t turn round on you to the people to whom you may wish to go, and say that you never *told* her you meant to look about.’

‘Oh, I see! You think, then, that it will be best for me to have a thorough understanding with her. But must it be verbally?’

‘Most decidedly. And for more than one reason. The most important is that by so doing you can learn thoroughly her intentions towards you, should you, after all, think it advisable to stay here for a time.’

‘Then I’ll go to her—but I don’t know how I shall screw up my courage to do it.’

‘Oh, nonsense. She can’t eat you, at all events. If I were you, I’d rather go

through a little more for something, than get nothing for all you've already done.'

'That's true,' I said. 'I'll do it.'

'Very well. But do it at once, mind. If you put it off, you won't do it at all.'

'I'll do it to-night, then, and let you know the result in the morning.'

'That's right. I begin to have some hope now of your ultimate escape. Now I think I'd better go on with my music.'

She did so; and I went on with my thoughts and plans; the result of the latter being that at half-past eight o'clock that evening I found myself in the drawing-room, once more in the presence of Miss Grimshaw. I had feared sending a message to her, expecting, if I did so, she would simply refuse me an interview altogether, or at the best postpone it indefinitely, either of which events would have been awkward for me, as time, in my present dilemma, was valuable. I had therefore boldly resolved to enter the drawing-room without any more formal intro-

duction than a knock at the door. With a beating heart I had carried this resolution into effect.

Her look of surprise on my presenting myself in reply to her 'Come in,' changed instantaneously to one of anger, flushing her face crimson.

'Miss Browne,' she said, in a cold, satirical tone, as I went across the room towards her, apologising for my intrusion, 'may I ask to what I am indebted for the honour of this visit?'

'I must beg you to pardon my abrupt behaviour, Miss Grimshaw. The only excuse I can offer is that it is very necessary for me to speak to you personally and without delay. I wish to ask you to be kind enough to give me a verbal reply to the note you received from me a week ago.'

All my fear had vanished, and I spoke out boldly. Whether the audacity of my request overpowered her, or she had not recovered the first audacity of my unex-



pected entrance, I know not ; but, certainly, for once in her life, she was at a loss for words..

‘ Miss Browne,’ she said at last, ‘ it is not my custom to vouchsafe replies to notes sent me by my pupils, or, in fact, by any inmate of this establishment. It is not my custom even to peruse such notes. There are facilities of communication with me, which render the inauguration of what may be termed a local post between the study and the drawing-room, not only needless, but ludicrous. I certainly, however, did receive a note the other day from some one of my pupils, by the peculiar method of transmission referred to, but of the individuality of the delinquent I was, till this moment, ignorant. Knowing now that that delinquent was yourself, I beg to tell you that your effusion shared the fate of its predecessors—for I must confess that you are not the first in your community who has forgotten herself so far as to insult me with an attempt at an epistolary correspondence. It shared the

fate of its predecessors, Miss Browne. It was committed, unopened, to the flames. Now, I must beg you to leave me.'

She bowed her head, to end the interview, motioning towards the door with her hand; but, for once, I was not to be turned from my purpose.

'Miss Grimshaw,' I said, 'if you did not read my note, it is necessary for me to tell you its contents, for I am most anxious for a reply.'

'I cannot speak to you to-night, Miss Browne.'

'There will be no need for you to speak, Miss Grimshaw,' I went on, in sheer desperation. 'I have only to tell you that, after deep consideration, I have decided upon not remaining at the college after the present term.'

I had not intended, when I entered the room, to conclude matters so summarily; I had meant to take soundings, as it were, of the general state of things, and continue

in my present home or not, according as Miss Grimshaw should elect to deal with me. But when an answer to my letter was denied me, I lost my head utterly, and gave way to my anger, regardless of consequences.

‘I have quite decided, Miss Grimshaw,’ I repeated, emphatically, ‘upon not remaining at the college after the present term.’

Her eyes and the door of the room opened simultaneously at this juncture—the former, to express the most unmitigated astonishment—(I am sure it was feigned)—the latter, to admit Mr. Harrop.

I turned round and met his eyes fixed on me. Instantaneously, as he stood before me for a moment, I thought I saw an inexplicable change in him—a change in his general appearance—a change in his expression—a change in every way ; and yet, on my second observation of him, no change at all. What could it mean ? I stood looking at him as if I were dazed. He was the same, and yet

not the same. My third impression was, that though when I had last seen him seated in his chair by the fire, he had seemed to me to be in no way altered from what he had been in the years gone by, yet now there was something about him—yes—there was a change. But where was this change? In any case, on my second observation of it, it was not as perceptible as it had been when it had first impressed me on his entrance into the room. I couldn't tell what it was. Yes; I could. I could tell now. It was this. His eyes, his hair, his light moustache and whiskers, his straight nose, his white even teeth, and firm grave mouth, were all as they had been. But this was the alteration. The sharp, eager look, which had once reminded me of an eagle, had vanished from his face, giving place to still an intelligent, but certainly a more noble expression; and he was younger than, and not quite so tall as, from my past childish notice of him, I had imagined him to be.

All this observation passed through my mind during the less than half-minute I stood watching him. Then, waking up to a sense of the singularity of my conduct, I turned my eyes hastily away from him, and again fixed my attention on Miss Grimshaw. I saw at once that that lady's expression of astonishment had not yet subsided. Her face was set and motionless ; her gaze fixed steadily on me, as though she were totally unaware of the addition to our society.

Mr. Harrop, after surveying us for a few moments longer, walked listlessly across the room to his old chair by the fire-place, and sat down. Silence for yet a few seconds. Then he took the initiative, and spoke.

‘Miss Grimshaw,’ he said, ‘is this’ a Quakers’ meeting?’

She turned round and faced him, as she had faced him at our last interview. ‘Mr. Harrop,’ she said, ‘Miss Browne has come down to me this evening without obtaining, or even asking for, my consent to her doing so.

I thought I detected a half-smile on his countenance as he heard my first offence.

‘Well, Miss Grimshaw,’ he replied, ‘such a proceeding is certainly almost excusable, if the business in hand does not admit of delay; but in any case, why not proceed to it at once?’

‘She is come,’ she continued, without appearing to notice his remarks, ‘to tell me that she intends breaking the terms of the agreement into which she entered with me the other evening, and quitting the college at the end of the present term. She has no——’

‘Miss Grimshaw,’ I interrupted, ‘you are quite mistaken. There was no agreement made between us. You were, or affected to be, much hurt at what you were pleased to denominate my “ingratitude” in wishing to leave you. Believing, at the time, in the genuineness of this expression of feeling on your part, and anxious to prove to you that I am not, at least, of an unthank-

ful nature, I consented to remain here ; but any agreement as to the terms on which I was to remain was not even hinted at.'

She was about to speak, but I would not give her the chance. I went on rapidly.

'It is to this point I wish to bring you, and it is this point you appear to me studiously to avoid—viz., whether it is your desire to render my stay here possible, by making such terms with me as in justice to myself I can accept. If such is the case, I shall retract my words, and be most happy to remain. But, if not, as I before stated to you, it becomes necessary for me to leave you ; but in doing so, I shall break no agreement, for no agreement has been made. It seems to me that——'

Frightened at my own daring, and exhausted with the effort of speaking so vehemently, I stopped here, unable to proceed.

'It seems to me,' said Mr. Harrop, taking up my words, rising as he spoke, and placing



himself in the middle of the hearth-rug with his back to the fire, and his arms behind him—‘it seems to me that there is some mistake here.’

‘You will excuse me,’ I broke in, turning to him, for by this time my flagging courage and power of speech had returned—‘you will excuse me, but the subject on which I have been addressing Miss Grimshaw concerns her and myself alone ; consequently any interference on your part is at once uncalled for and misplaced.’

He was a very strongly-built, powerful man, and as I looked up at him in delivering this speech, I felt as if I were a mouse under the shadow of a mountain. My antagonist, on his part, seemed about as much appalled at my words as the aforesaid production of nature might be at a threat of the minute animal in question to undermine its foundation. He merely threw a quiet glance down upon me and smiled calmly, as though I were a child. This look and smile made his reply

appear to me satirical, though probably he did not mean to be so.

‘I am sorry,’ he said, with a slight inclination of the head, ‘even to seem to be rude in the eyes of any young lady, more especially one who has such clear ideas, and also possesses the power of expressing them so graphically as Miss Browne.’

I made no reply, feeling by this time ashamed of my hastiness and boldness.

‘With respect to the charge of “interference,”’ he went on, after a pause, with a humorous twinkle in his eyes, ‘I shall probably be entirely exonerated from it, when I inform Miss Browne that the business in which she accuses me of “interfering,” in point of fact concerns me equally with herself and Miss Grimshaw, seeing that I am, in truth, the owner of the establishment in which we are now assembled.’

‘It’s not your college. It’s Mr. Harrop’s college.’ The words came back to me in a moment. Since the night I had heard them

uttered, they had slipped from my mind till now. Now, they sounded in my ears again, teaching me the explanation of this gentleman's frequent presence in the drawing-room, and of many things of which, previously, I had completely failed in fathoming the meaning. Thoroughly ashamed of myself now, I began hurriedly to express to him my contrition for the rudeness of which I had been guilty.

‘It is not necessary to apologise,’ he interrupted, with a slight gesture of his hand. ‘You will be better occupied in fighting it out—ahem!—in completing your arrangements with Miss Grimshaw.’

‘There are no arrangements to complete,’ said that lady, sharply. ‘Miss Browne has expressed her wish to leave me, and has shown her contempt for truth so unmistakably, that I cannot permit her to remain under this roof for a moment longer than she has the right to remain.’

‘In what way, Miss Grimshaw,’ I asked

as calmly as I could speak—which I fear was not very calmly—‘in what way have I shown my contempt for truth?’

She made no reply, only motioning me to the door, in the now to me familiar way, with her hands and eyes.

‘It is *you* who show contempt for truth when you say falsely that I show it,’ I went on passionately. ‘You are annoyed and provoked that you cannot succeed in keeping me here to work for nothing, and you say this out of revenge.’

The same dark, vindictive look came into her face which I had seen there on that night, long back, when I had spoken as hastily and unadvisedly as now.

‘I shall have left this place for ever, I trust, in a few days’ time, Miss Grimshaw, and I defy you to say that I have ever, in the slightest degree, imitated the example you have invariably set me of hypocrisy and deceit.’

‘Will you leave the room, Miss Browne,’

she said slowly when I paused, 'or must *I* do so?'

'I have yet one word to say to you before either of us leave it, Miss Grimshaw,' I replied. 'I say it now, as it may be my best and perhaps my only opportunity of saying it. It is this : If ever the time should come—as I trust it will—when you feel you need forgiveness from Heaven for—for—for—we will say your general course of conduct, let no thought of me make the bitterness of that moment more bitter. I forgive you freely.'

'Ahem !' This from Mr. Harrop.

I really believe, as I uttered it, that I thought this peroration sublime. But I must do myself the justice to say that, in spite of my self-conceit, it came from my heart, and that I did not feel the least resentment towards my opponent. Had I had less cause for it, I should probably have felt it.

Miss Grimshaw's opinion of my eloquence was only discernible in her face, which had grown more rigid and pallid as I pro-

ceeded. Waiting for no more distinct manifestation of it, I said 'Good evening' to her in as polite a tone as I could assume, and, with a slight bow to Mr. Harrop, who was watching me now with a more serious expression on his face than I had ever seen there before, I quitted the room, fated never to see one of its occupants again.

## CHAPTER XIII.

I REPORTED progress next day to my new friend Ellen Murray, and she agreed with me that matters had a very black aspect indeed.

‘I don’t know what to advise,’ she said. ‘There’s not time before the end of the term for you to get anything; and even if there were, how could you set about it?’

‘I must do something,’ I said, half sullenly.

‘But what? I have been thinking since I saw you that even if I got your letters posted for you, Grim would read and burn the replies. No one could get *them* for you, that is, if they came here, for she keeps the key of the letter-box, my dear. Certainly you *could* have them addressed to a post-



office, and fetched on the sly; but if you heard of anything she'd be safe to leave no stone unturned to find out *how* you heard of it, which information it would no doubt be easy to obtain from the person wishing to employ you, and then, where are you? She would have a pretty addition to the ingratitude and insolence she now credits you with, wouldn't she?

'Then there's no alternative,' I said. 'I must go out of the college, houseless and homeless.'

'Oh, don't talk like that. Something can surely be done. Where's your friend, Miss Launceston? Why haven't you written to *her*? She'd do anything for you.'

'I know it,' I said, bitterly. 'She wrote to me some time ago, and offered to help me in the fullest sense of the term, but I refused; and now my letters must have missed her in some way, or something else has happened, for I've had no reply to the last two I've written. I don't know where

she is, and even if I did, I couldn't ask her to assist me, after telling her I wouldn't accept her assistance.'

My new friend sat silent, looking troubled. It was evident to my experience that she had no further advice to offer me.

'Never mind,' I went on; 'I have a few little treasures I can sell when I leave here, and so secure a home till something turns up; I don't see what good it will do to worry myself. It's no use thinking about anything till I'm safely out of the college, that's certain.'

'It makes me so unhappy that I don't seem able to help you,' said the friendly girl. 'I can't think how it will all end.'

'Oh! It will end in some way or other, I suppose,' I answered carelessly. 'It *must* end in some way or other, and it's silly to anticipate troubles.' Then, with a sudden thought, 'By the way, do you know Mr. Harrop?'

'Know him?'

‘Yes ; who is he ?’

‘Do you mean Mr. Harrop who owns the college ?’

‘Oh ! that’s it,’ I said. ‘Is he *really* the owner of it ?’

‘Oh, yes. It belongs in reality to him, though Miss Grimshaw conducts and manages it, and I believe, now, has a share in it. Didn’t you know it was his ? Why, where have your wits been all these years not to have heard that ?’

‘I didn’t know it till he told me the other night.’

‘Did *he* tell you *himself* ?’ she asked in surprise.

‘Yes ; he came into the drawing-room while I was there.’

I related the facts of my late interview with which he was connected ; having purposely omitted them previously, in order to shorten my story to my young friend.

‘It’s very odd,’ she said. ‘I’ve never heard of his speaking to any of the girls

before. Some of them have seen him on "reception-nights," but they all say he's usually reading the paper, and he certainly never takes any notice of or speaks to them.'

'Do you like him?'

'I don't know him. I never saw him in my life. He's only here for two or three weeks about twice a year, I believe. They say Grim makes an awful fuss with him when he *is* here, and shows him off as her tame cat among the grandees of the neighbourhood—that is, when she can get him to follow her. He always takes her to the opera, or anything that's going on, when he's here, but I don't fancy he likes her, for all that.'

'Why doesn't he like her?'

'I don't *say* he doesn't. It's only what I gather from the chit-chat of the college.'

'I never seem to hear any of the "chit-chat" as you call it.'

'And a good thing too. It's much more wholesome to mind one's own business than

trouble about other people's. There's our enemy, dear. I must go. We shall meet again to-morrow, and I hope you will then be able to see your way more clearly than now.'

So saying my friend disappeared.

I never saw her face again. The next morning she slipped on the stairs and sprained her ankle severely. After she had remained a few days in the infirmary, I heard that at the request of her parents Miss Grimshaw had allowed her to return home before the vacation commenced. I took no further advice from any of my companions. I simply adhered to the resolution I had formed of deferring all attempts to secure an appointment till after I had escaped from the college.

The days went by, and the last one of the term drew near. I continued firm. At times a sudden and awful sense of loneliness and desolation would, as it were, crush me for a moment; the next my courage would return, and I would feel even braver than before it

left me. For several reasons, not worth detailing here, I thought it best to keep my intention of leaving Miss Grimshaw a secret from my schoolfellows, and, as Ellen Murray had promised me to observe absolute silence on the subject, I was not troubled with enquiries. All but herself evidently concluded, from my previous statement when questioned, that I had delivered myself over to the enemy to remain in her clutches for the term of my natural life.

It was with a feeling of delight that I rose from my bed on the last morning of my school days. The first had found me a mere child, ignorant of all the experience the world can give, except the bitter experience of suffering. The last found me almost in the same state, ignorant of nearly all the experience of life except this same bitter experience of suffering. It may be that this suffering helped to harden me, and render the succeeding trials of life comparatively easy to bear, for I can truly say that many

things I was afterwards called upon to endure (which would have hurt severely most other girls in the same position as myself) seemed to me like blows falling upon a dulled surface—dulled almost to insensibility.

I remember that it appeared that last morning to my inexperience and ignorance, as though the plan I had laid out for my future was not only possible but easy to effect. It is to me at the present moment astonishing that at the age I then was—for I had entered my nineteenth year—I had so few truthful impressions of the world! With regard to my immediate future I had no fears. I looked on it as hopefully as a child might have done, who is not capable of forming a rational opinion on any subject.

I had a ring of some value, a pair of earrings, and a gold chain. These had been, at different times, gifts from my dead parents. I purposed selling them. What amount of money I imagined I should receive in return



I know not ; but I certainly concluded that it would be sufficient to keep me independent for some considerable time, before the expiration of which I thought I should be certain to obtain some engagement, which would enable me to lay by the residue of my riches, to be again resorted to in case of need. With immediate wants thus, in fancy, provided for, I never contemplated the possibility of other difficulties in my path. Any thought of the need for protection, which a friendless girl ever has in the open world alone, did not once enter my mind. I was too strong in the strength of my ignorance to fear undefined evils, and I looked upon a future fraught with danger as though it were bright with the brightest rainbow colours. Though not originally of a fearless nature, I now faced my destiny bravely, dreaming of no chance of failure or defeat. In imagination I already saw myself safely housed in a pleasant home, where everyone loved and respected me, and I myself led a peaceful

and contented life, with no fear of unhappiness nor change.

Certainly if the ceaseless round of study pursued at Victoria College had its evils, still to counterbalance them it had one good effect. The very fact of constant occupation, together with the silence imposed upon almost all occasions when study was not absolutely on hand, prevented in a great measure that immorality of thought and conversation, which, like a pestilence walking in darkness, pervades with few exceptions all large boarding-schools. It is not an unusual occurrence in these communities for a dozen or more girls, in some leisure hour, to converse secretly upon and discuss subjects, the very mention of which in open conversation would dye their cheeks with blushes. What Mr. Thackeray has said upon this subject in relation to boys is equally true if applied to girls. He speaks to the effect that mothers looking upon their young sons just returned to them for the

holidays as innocent children, little think of the innocence-destroying knowledge they have been acquiring during their absence from home. So may they, nowadays, looking upon their fair young daughters just fresh from school, be as painfully deceived !

However, this evil could not have existed to any very great extent at Victoria College. And I judge this also from the fact that I, who had been there so long, could form such a plan for the future as I did form, without fearing, or even indeed being actually cognisant of, one class of dangers that might beset my path.

To return to my actual life. In spite of my precautions, the natural talent of woman for obtaining information as to her neighbour's affairs had at length prevailed. By some means or other, it became known to all the girls in the college on that last morning, though I believe not before, that I was about to quit it for good. Miss Grimshaw was, of course, aware of my intentions, but the day

passed on with no remark to me on her part.

It was usual for the 'regular pupils,' as they were called, to leave for the vacation as early in the morning as possible, the governess-pupils and governesses remaining to assist till all their superiors were departed. Knowing this, I went quietly on with my duties, helping the children to dress, &c., with no interruption till dinner-time. When the last little one was fairly off and the eating and drinking over, I followed the example of my companions, who were too busy to take much notice of me, and went to my room. Then I set to work in earnest, and put quickly together all my worldly possessions. They were few indeed. My wardrobe had been replenished in nothing but boots, shoes, gloves, and such small necessaries during the whole of my stay at the college. My box was large enough to hold three times as much as I had to put into it. When my packing was completed, I sat thinking, almost

afraid to begin to act, as I had thoroughly decided upon acting. The tea-bell rang. I took no notice, still pondering painfully for perhaps nearly another hour. No one came near me. In the bustle and confusion I was, no doubt, for the time forgotten and unheeded by all. At last I rose, looked at my pale face in the glass, slipped on my hat and cloak, and tried to nerve myself to do whatever I judged best.

How should I begin? Should I go out of the house without seeking Miss Grimshaw? Under ordinary circumstances none of the governess-pupils ever went to her individually to say good-bye, it being her custom, on the last day of the term, to bid adieu collectively after dinner to all of them who were leaving finally or for the vacation. 'Good-day, young ladies; I hope we may meet again,' was the usual formula. This ceremony having been observed that very day, I was certainly at liberty, if I pleased, to consider myself dismissed with a blessing;

but how if, after my departure, my enemy should affect the most entire ignorance of my previous intentions? That she was quite capable of adopting this course, should it answer her purpose to do so, I was fully aware. 'Therefore,' I said to myself with a sudden effort, 'I will summon my courage, and ask to see her.'

As I stood pondering as to the best method of getting a message transmitted to her without attracting general attention, I heard a footstep near the door of the room. I opened it quickly, and seeing, as I had expected, a servant, called to her to stop. Strangely enough, it was the very girl who, nearly three years previously, had obtained me my first interview with Miss Grimshaw, and I now resolved to make her the medium of my last. I first requested her to take my box down to the hall-door, and then to ask her mistress if I could speak to her for a moment.

She agreed willingly, removing with my

assistance my worldly possessions, as I directed (to my great joy meeting no one on the way), and then departing on her more important mission, while I rapidly returned to my old quarters, where I waited as patiently as possible for the advent of my messenger.

‘Miss Grimshaw says she will see you to-morrow, Miss; she has no time this evening.’ Then, noticing my perplexed look, ‘Between me and you, Miss, I think she’s going out for the evening. She’s dressed as if she was, and Mr. Harrop’s going too, I fancy.’

‘Oh!’ I exclaimed; ‘do go to her again as quickly as possible, and tell her I am just leaving, and ask her if she wants to speak to me before I go.’

She rushed off, and returned in a few moments, but, in my impatience, those few moments seemed to me like an hour.

‘Miss Grimshaw says, Miss, she has nothing whatever to say to you—nothing whatever.’



‘Very well,’ I replied. ‘Thank you very much.’

And she left me standing alone, with the tears in my eyes.

I wondered then at such weakness, but scarcely do so now. I felt so deserted and desolate that even the refusal to see me of a woman I disliked and despised had power to increase the depression that was natural at such a moment. Hastily dashing the tears away, I went quickly downstairs. As I approached the study I heard the voices of some of my late companions talking to and endeavouring to cheer those among their number who, less fortunate than themselves, were doomed to remain at the college during the holidays. Wondering whether I had been missed by them or not, I at first thought I would enter and let them know I was just starting, but the recollection of the cross-questioning I should doubtless have to endure, and the misery of saying a last ‘good-bye’ to those who now seemed the only friends I

had in the world, made me shrink from the ordeal, and I went on my way without even pausing at the door. 'They all know I intend going to-day, some time or other,' I said to myself, 'so they will not be so much surprised to hear that I'm gone. Some of them, at least, might have taken the trouble to seek after me.' In this I was unjust, for had not I, individually, been too much occupied with my own affairs to heed or think of what did not immediately concern myself?

When I arrived at the bottom of the stairs my progress was arrested. I encountered the same girl who had brought me Miss Grimshaw's final message.

'Oh Miss!' she exclaimed hurriedly, 'I was afraid you might be already started. Mr. Harrop has sent me to tell you, Miss, that before you go, he should like to see you, if you will kindly go to him in the drawing-room.'

'What does he want?' I asked, surprised, and a little alarmed.

'I don't know, at all, Miss. He's a kind

gentleman, perhaps he only wishes to say "Good-bye."

'Is Miss Grimshaw there too?' I asked, after thinking a moment.

'No, Miss. She's just gone out.'

'I thought you said Mr. Harrop was going with her?'

'So he was, Miss, I think. At least,' she added, hesitatingly, 'I am sure he said he was, only I suppose he's altered his mind.'

'Then he's not going at all?'

'I don't know, Miss. When I answered the bell, he was standing at the window with his hat and gloves on the table. Perhaps he's only waiting to see you first. I got out of the room as soon as I could, for though he spoke kindly, his eyes looked so fierce that I was almost frightened out of my wits.'

'Fierce?' I said. 'Is he angry?'

'I fancy, Miss, he's angry with Miss Gr——. Oh, I think you'd better go down at once. It's not my business, Miss. I might lose my place for talking.'

‘You’re quite right,’ I answered. ‘I—I’ll go.’ There seemed no reason why I should not do so, and yet I hesitated.

‘Shall I tell him you’re gone, Miss? He’ll be none the wiser if you don’t let him see you go.’

‘No,’ I exclaimed; ‘I would not let you do that on any account. It’s perhaps better for me to speak to him as Miss Grimshaw will not see me. I’ll go at once.’

## CHAPTER XIV.

I ASCENDED the stairs hastily, taking care to knock at the door before going into the room.

‘Come in.’

The speaker advanced as I entered, and invited me to be seated in a kind, ‘elderly’ manner, if I may so call it, that at once took away all my embarrassment. This manner, I noticed, seemed natural to him, though he could not have been more than thirty-three or thirty-four years of age.

‘Miss Browne,’ he said, in a kind, friendly tone, ‘I have to apologise for sending for you in such an unceremonious way, but I thought it my—I thought, in fact, that I ought to see you before you left here, and I had no better method of obtaining an interview.’

‘It is of no consequence——’ I stammered.

‘I regret very much,’ he went on, ‘that you think it necessary to give up your home here so suddenly, and also that you should do so under such unpleasant circumstances. I think it is but right of me to tell you that, in my opinion, you are taking a very rash and imprudent step. I trust that, at all events, you have at least deeply considered what you are about to do.’

He paused as if expecting a reply.

‘It may be rash and imprudent,’ I answered, after some consideration; ‘but I cannot stay here, simply because it would not be to my interest to do so.’

‘I have not said that it would,’ he said, gravely; ‘but have you no alternative between remaining here—for ever, we will say—and casting yourself upon the world in the way you contemplate at present? You are old enough to know how undesirable it is for a young girl to be entirely dependent upon

herself, and under no control but her own. And yet you are a mere child,' he went on, with what seemed to me a sort of good-natured contempt; 'you are a mere child—you cannot be more than seventeen years of age.'

'I am going on for nineteen,' I replied calmly.

'Indeed!' lifting his eyebrows with a look that said plainly to my imagination, 'You are *certainly* old enough, then, to know better.' 'Now, will you not be persuaded by me to stay here till you see your way clearer before you?'

'Certainly not,' I answered. 'I have quite decided. I do not intend to remain another night in this house.'

'It hurts and distresses me,' he said, after a pause, 'to see a young girl like yourself alone and friendless. Knowing, as I do, what a difficult and arduous career is before you, it not only grieves, but shocks me, to see you so obstinately bent on taking your



own path, and so decided in your rejection of all advice and counsel.'

'I have not rejected any advice,' I said, with a sudden revulsion of feeling, the effort to keep back my tears almost suffocating me. 'I have had no one to advise me. If I could see any prospect but unhappiness and poverty in remaining here, I should not act as I am acting.'

'Then why reject the offer which Miss Grimshaw made to you this morning?'

'She made me no offer,' I said, in surprise; 'she has not spoken to me all day.'

He coloured violently, and fixed his eyes full upon me with a most scrutinising expression.

'Do I understand you rightly? Miss Grimshaw has not spoken to you to-day—nor,' he added hastily, 'sent you any message?'

'No. She has not spoken to me since the last time I was in this room, when you were present, nor has she sent me any message.'

He looked at me still more intently for a moment, then, hastily recovering his usual manner—

‘There’s some mistake,’ he said; ‘some mistake.’

The explanation of this ‘mistake,’ as he called it, did not come to me for years after, and then only because in referring, in my mind, to this scene in the past, my matured judgment taught me the truth.

‘Should it be in my power,’ he went on, after a pause, ‘to arrange with Miss Grimshaw for you to stay here, on terms more advantageous to yourself than those which I have but lately heard, with the deepest regret, she is in the habit of proposing to young ladies situated as you are, would you be willing to remain?’

‘I scarcely know,’ I said. ‘Anything seems better than leaving in this way; and yet I am sure that in the end I shall be sorry if I stay.’

‘But, my child, when you quit this house

to-night, what will you do? where will you go? have you any settled plan to act upon? have you money? have you a single friend?’

‘No,’ I sobbed, unable any longer to restrain my tears; ‘I have no friends. God will take care of me. I must trust in Him.’

He made no remark, but, taking some wine from a small table near, hastily filled a glass with it, and placed it before me.

‘Drink that,’ he said, ‘and then we can talk quietly of what must be done.’

When I had obeyed him, he turned from me, thinking intently for a few moments.

‘I don’t know,’ he said at last, ‘what to advise you to do. I do not wish to persuade you to remain here any longer, if such a course would really render you unhappy. You say it would do so?’

‘Pray let me go,’ I answered, ‘pray let me go. I could never be happy with Miss Grimshaw. I could never feel towards her as I ought to feel towards the lady by whom I am employed.’

‘Is that your only objection?’

‘No,’ I said, hesitating; ‘there are others.’

Here I stopped, foolishly fearful of complaining of the hard work which had fallen to my lot, and which, in the prospect of immediate emancipation, seemed to me like torture.

‘Ah! some girlish reasons, I suppose, which you do not care to tell me.’

I suffered him to believe this, rather than let him know the truth. I fancied if I explained matters he might simply think I was inclined to be idle.

‘Well,’ he went on, ‘be it so. You are determined to give up your position here, and, that being settled, we have now to make our arrangements for your immediate future. Will you remain here as a visitor, on my invitation, till you succeed in meeting with a suitable engagement?’

‘No,’ I said; ‘I cannot do that.’

‘Not if Miss Grimshaw seconds it?’

‘No. She would only do so because you desired her to, and—and——’

‘Because *I* desired her?’ he interrupted, with a short laugh. ‘No, scarcely that.’

‘And besides,’ I went on, not heeding his remark, ‘I sent to her a short time ago to say I was going now, directly, and she would not even see me. Do you suppose that, after that, I will stay in this house on her sufferance?’

‘No, not on her sufferance, but by my invitation.’

‘You are very kind,’ I said, ‘and I am very, very grateful; but I would rather go at once.’

‘Very well, then, you shall do so. Now, tell me the first step you will take when you leave this house.’

‘I shall get a cab,’ I answered, ‘and ask the cabman to drive me to any cheap, respectable lodgings he knows of, or can find.’

I shall never forget the peculiar expression that grew on his face as I spoke, ending, however, in a quiet smile.

‘What a charming opinion you must

have formed of London cabmen ! However, supposing all goes well, and you get safely housed, how will you pay for the accommodation ?’

‘I have some money,’ I said, ‘and I have means of getting more.’

This was true. About a year previously, not liking to be absolutely penniless, I had sold some small trinkets to a schoolfellow for a few shillings. The money I had obtained for them was still in my possession, and to provide for my wants when it should be expended, I purposed, as I have already mentioned, selling some other valuables, which had been given to me by my parents.

‘You have money, and means of getting more ! May I enquire, as a friend, without being considered inquisitive, whether you reckon your present riches by sovereigns, or by shillings ? And whether the future provision you speak of may be denominated extensive, or not ?’

He laughed heartily as he spoke, and I involuntarily followed his example.

‘Come,’ he said, ‘we must be serious. Are you really independent of assistance of any kind?’

‘Yes, really. I have the means of satisfying both present wants and future necessities. It’s true, indeed it is.’

‘I believe you, of course; but I heard to the contrary, and from a very good authority too; or one which I have been told I am bound to consider such. I am pleased, though, to hear your present statement; it redeems you from the charge brought against you by the same authority, of acting in a—childish and thoughtless manner. It appears to me,’—he went on hesitatingly, something of the old satirical expression gathering on his mouth like a cloud,—‘it appears to me that you are a rather reserved young lady, as well as a determined one.’

I coloured deeply, for the new tone he had adopted pained me, and brought back



my old feeling for him of dislike and dread.

‘I do not know that I am reserved, naturally,’ I said, ‘but reserve is necessary sometimes. It is scarcely wise to publish one’s affairs indiscriminately to the whole world.’

‘Certainly not,’ he replied, laughing again, but not unkindly ; ‘you are quite right. However, you’ve confided them to *me*, and I’m not only glad they are in the state you say, but will take care, as far as I am concerned, that the information you have favoured me with goes no farther. To proceed to another point though, on which I am totally ignorant. Supposing these extensive riches should prove exhaustible ? It *might* be the case, you know, though I ought not, perhaps, to be so bold as to assert that such a thing is possible. Supposing that in the course of—of months—we will say, they *should* take to themselves wings and fly away, leaving their present owner unprovided for, what will she do then ?’

‘I trust never to be in such a predicament. I hope soon to have something to do.’

‘My child,’ he said gravely, ‘there is so much hope in the world, and so much despair to follow it, that I tremble for you, not knowing this, not knowing how quickly the one succeeds the other.’

‘It is not always so,’ I said. ‘It cannot be always so.’

‘More often than you think. However, I trust that you may never prove the truth of my words. Now, will you promise me to do one thing?’

‘Yes,’ I said; ‘if possible I will do it.’

‘It is very easy to do. It is merely to write here and let me know should you be in need. It will not only be my desire, but a great pleasure to me to assist you.’

I hesitated.

‘Come, promise,’ he said. ‘It’s only right that I should not let you off till you have done so. It hurts me to see a young girl like you, little more than a child, strug-

gling through life without a friend, perhaps, and not unlikely destined, if not assisted, to come to absolute want. I cannot let you go until you have engaged to write and let me know, should you ever need help. You have lived here, an inmate of this house, for three years; and the circumstances under which you are leaving it appear to me to make the provision for your immediate future to devolve to a certain extent upon me. I take this upon me as a duty. You must permit me to act towards you as a father when the time comes that you feel the need of one.'

'I will let you know,' I said, scarcely able to speak for conflicting feelings.

'I thank you,' he replied gravely. 'Will you allow me farther to say one word more to you before you go—and not be offended at it?'

'Yes. Anything you wish.'

'It is this. In the course of your life, which, I fear, bids fair at present to be toilsome and full of troubles, you will meet with

many circumstances calculated to ruffle the serenest spirit. Take this one word of advice from me, my child. Never give way again to such an outbreak of temper as I have seen you exhibit in this room. Passion and insensate anger will not eradicate, nor even lessen, any pain we suffer. They but increase it, and oftentimes irritate its source. Nothing can stand against Wrong but Right; and the silent protest of our own just conduct against that of the person who wrongs us has more weight and power to disarm the wrong-doer, and eventually stay the wrong, than the fiercest passion, or the wildest revenge. Remember this; whatever may be your cause for anger, guard against the undue expression of it, as you would guard against fire, or death.'

'I'll try to do as you say. You are so good to me,' I said.

'Not at all. I only do that which, in the absence of your natural protector, has fallen to my lot. If what I have said has any good effect in the future, I am more than repaid,

though for what—in truth I know not. Now,’ he went on in a lighter tone, ‘I am going to fetch a cab for you.’ He took his hat and gloves from the table as he spoke.

‘Pray do not trouble,’ I said. ‘One of the servants will see to it for me.’

‘I intend doing it myself, with your permission. I have a plan in my head which I must beg you not to attempt to frustrate.’

He signed to me to precede him downstairs to the hall, where my boxes were waiting my arrival.

‘Is this your luggage?’ he asked, as his eye rested on them.

‘Yes.’

‘And the extent of your worldly possessions, I suppose?’

‘Yes,’ I answered again, laughing at the expression of his face.

‘Well, we must contrive now to get some vehicle to transport the lot of you to another place.’

He opened the door, and after carefully

examining the cabmen about, dozens of whom invariably haunted the College gates on the last day of a term, beckoned to one of them, who at once came towards us.

‘ Ah, Smith, I’m glad to find you ; was afraid you might not be near. Had a busy day ? ’

‘ Pretty well, Sir.’

In a short time my luggage was safely placed on the top of the conveyance, and myself inside.

‘ Now you are all right, I suppose ? ’

‘ Yes. Thank you. I am so very much obliged to you for all your kindness,’ I added. ‘ I am afraid, too, I have detained you when you were going out.’

‘ Not from any place to which I cared to go, at all events. Besides, to be detained by a young lady is supposed, under any circumstances, to cause us unfortunates pleasure, not regret. You see, I know how to make polite speeches. And now, good-bye, my child. Send to me at once if there should ever be

the slightest necessity for doing so. Let me hear from you the first moment the grim wolf shows his head. Keep your promise.'

'I will be sure to do so. Thank you very, very much. Good-bye.'

He took my hand kindly and raised his hat. 'God bless you,' he said, 'and make you happy.' Through my blinding tears I saw him talking to the cabman before he started. At last we were fairly off, my new friend raising his hat again, as he caught a glimpse of me, disappearing.



## CHAPTER XV.

I SAT silent for a few moments, recovering my calmness, and then began to wonder to what place the man was driving me. 'In a moment I had pulled the check-string, and his head was at the window.

'Will you please take me to some cheap lodgings?' I said—'any you can find?'

'The gentleman what paid me told me where to drive to, Miss. He said you was to go to Mrs. Gray's. She's got some rooms to let. I told the gentleman so.'

'Are you quite sure she has some?'

'Lots and lots, Miss. She asked me to-day to think of her, if I heard of anyone wanting "'commodation."'

'Very well,' I said; 'we had better go there.'

It seemed to me that before I had time to feel grateful to my benefactor for these fresh acts of kindness, the cab again stopped, and the door was opened.

‘This is the house, Miss. Shall I knock?’

‘Thank you,’ I said, alighting. ‘Please to do so.’

It was a small white neat cottage, with green wooden palings and flowers in the windows. The old lady who answered the door looked as clean as her dwelling.

‘Have you a bedroom to let?’ I asked.

‘Yes, Miss, I have several.’

‘Can I see one, please?’

She led the way upstairs, and in a few minutes I was the temporary owner of a pretty sleeping-room, with the privilege of going in and out of the old lady’s own little parlour as I pleased. In the meantime the cabman, as if sure that I was suited, had placed my luggage in the passage.

‘I’m right, ain’t I, Miss?’

‘Yes, thank you.’

‘I made bold to conclude you’d stop here. The gentleman told me to come here first, where he knew, like me, you’d get took good care of; but if by any chance you couldn’t be taken in, I was to drive you somewhere else he knew on, and if they was full, Miss, I was to take you back to the “Dragin,” Miss, no matter what you said.’

‘What do you mean?’ I asked.

‘No offence, Miss. The “Dragin” what keeps the College, Miss.’

‘Do you mean Miss Grimshaw?’ I said.

‘Ah, that’s her lovely name, Miss. I’ve heerd it afore. She’s called the “Dragin” ’mong us, private, you know. She’s one to them poor young gals, I’m sure. I’ve driv many on ’em to and from the College, in my time, Miss, and I never see’d one on ’em yet go in laughing,—and I never till to-day see’d one on ’em come out crying. You do be an extror’nary young lady, Miss. Good evening to you, and thank you. Good night, Mrs. Gray.’

‘Good night, Mr. Smith.’ And so departed my charioteer, my latest acquaintance closing the door after him.

‘So you’ve come from the College, Miss?’ said the old lady, after looking at me for a moment.

‘Yes. I’ve only just now left.’

‘I thought you looked like one of them young ladies when I saw you driving up; you’re so pale and thin like, as they mostly are. Aren’t you well?’

‘Yes, I think I’m quite well, but I’m very tired.’

‘Ah! You want some tea or supper, I suppose—but I should have judged you was ill, you look so white. Shall I get you something to eat? You had better have some of mine to-night, you know, just for acquaintance’ sake; then you can begin to-morrow to buy your own things.’

‘Thank you,’ I said, ‘you are very kind. I should like some tea better than anything.’

‘Very well, Miss. You just put your hat

and cape on a chair and lay down to rest on the sofa, and in ten minutes you shall have all you want.'

She had opened the door of the little parlour, and, as she spoke, I had passed in. It was a pretty cheerful room, and I felt at home in it directly.

'I would rather not lie down,' I said, 'for I am really not an invalid, but I would like to sit here and wait for my tea.'

She took my out door clothes from me and put them on the sofa, telling me she would take them upstairs for me presently. Then she disappeared to prepare the promised meal.

Left alone, I had plenty to occupy my mind. My thoughts flew first to Mr. Harrop, if indeed, I had really ceased to think of him for a moment since he had bidden me 'Good-bye.' As I thought I began to wonder. The strange change in his manner, or rather the remembrance of it, made me wonder. His great kindness made me wonder. In fact, *all* my remembrance of him

made me wonder. There was something in my experience of him that mystified me. He seemed, in my recollections of his voice and manner, to be changed, and yet the same—the same, yet changed—as he had appeared physically to me to be, but a short time before. Then the memory of his unexpected and disinterested kindness rested in my heart, and I could think of nothing else. I had looked forward to this evening as one of trouble and difficulty, to be spent in a long search for that which the goodness of a comparative stranger had provided me with in the course of a few minutes. I was safe, at all events, for the present. This knowledge filled me with gratitude and hope, but did not prevent my thoughts eventually reverting to my want of means for providing for future necessities. I began to calculate how much money I should be likely to get in return for the trinkets I had to part with; and, not to keep myself in suspense, or rather not to delay the pleasure of having the business

completed, I resolved to go out and try to sell them, before I lay down to sleep. Besides, it was necessary to dispose of them very soon, as my present finances would be exhausted in two or three days, even if they lasted so long. Again my thoughts flew to Mr. Harrop, and I suddenly felt ashamed of the untruths which my words to him had implied, when he had spoken to me of my pecuniary affairs. My pride had urged me to induce him to believe what was false, and he had fallen into the snare. I remembered the satirical tone of his voice, and the doubting expression of his face, when he had spoken of my being reserved ; and I imagined that I realised, as I had not done at the time, the full meaning of his remark. ‘ He was surprised,’ I said to myself, ‘ to find I was so deceitful as to conceal from Miss Grimshaw that I had money to go on with, and means of getting more.’ Perhaps he thought I had been guilty of an absolute falsehood. Perhaps she had told him that I had informed her I



was penniless. Any way, the recollection of his remark caused me intense pain. I felt that if he believed me capable of such deception, he must despise me. Then came suddenly upon me another recollection—that of an evening, years back, when my lost friend, Marion Launceston had described him to me as being himself untruthful. It seemed to me impossible that this could be so. She must be mistaken! And yet she had spoken so surely and decidedly. There was nothing to give colour to her statement, in my eyes, except the inexplicable change in his present manner and conduct to me from what they had been in the past. This I could not understand, and the more I pondered on it the more I was puzzled, and the more I wondered. Could it be the result of the qualities she had ascribed to him, and that now he was playing some part to suit his own purpose? ‘No, no, no,’ I said aloud, with a sudden repentance of the thought of the moment before. ‘It is her mistake. He

is all candour and goodness, and alas! he must despise me for my deceit!' I was wretched! Should I ever be able to deceive him? Very likely, never. Most likely, never. But he had told me to write to him if necessary. The remembrance filled my heart with a sudden joy which sent the blood crimson to my cheeks.

'Yet, why should I care?' I said, ashamed, with unreasoning vehemence, of my own feelings. 'It is nothing to me what he thinks. I dare say he would have been as kind to me if I had been ever so wicked. I feel grateful to him for all his goodness, but care nothing what he thinks of me—nothing at all!' But still I felt unhappy, and longed that I had not heard that tone in his voice, nor seen that look on his face. Poor, blind, miserable girl!

The old woman entering with my tea changed the current of my thoughts. When the meal was over I asked her if she knew of any shops near.

‘Oh! yes—plenty, Miss. What sort of shops do you want?’

‘Oh! all kinds,’ I said, thinking it best to keep my own secrets. ‘If you will direct me to some, I have no doubt I shall find what I require.’

‘There’s plenty just round the corner at the end of the street—to the left, as you go out. If you go the other way, you will get into the country.’

‘I don’t want to do that.’

‘Well, you’ll be all right if you turn to the left, Miss. Have you been this way before, in your walks?’

‘No. I went out very little at the College. I had better go while it’s light,’ I added, getting up and putting on my hat. ‘I shall not be long.’

Before leaving the house I went upstairs, shut the door of my room, and locked it noiselessly. Then I uncorded my trunk, and took from the top, where I had placed it to be ready to my hand, a small box containing

the gold chain, ring, and pair of ear-rings, before mentioned, all of which I valued highly—the first the gift of my dead father—the others of my dead mother. I opened it with an unsteady hand, and, almost blinded with tears, looked long and earnestly at its contents. There they lay! as my mother's hand had placed them, when she packed my things before I went to school. The little box had never once been opened since that day. I could not bear to take them from their resting-place, but my tears fell fast upon them, and I kissed them again and again, as though the dear hands which had placed them there were on them still—hands that would never again clasp mine! That would never again do any little act of love for me! That would never again be laid on me as in that last embrace, so little thought of as the last! Could she see me now? Would she be grieved that I parted with her gifts? It could not be. The alternative was absolute want. They must go! But it was a bitter

parting ; as bitter as the snapping of a last link between ourselves and some dead past must ever be, for I had no other token of the love of my parents to keep for their sake till death.

I breathed some sort of prayer through my tears—what, I know not—but it calmed me, and, once more kissing the contents, I closed the box.

As I did so, another memory came upon me. The box itself brought to my mind my long-absent, long-unheard-of brother. It was the same from which, on the morning he had left his home, he had taken the money he had then asked me for. The events of that day returned vividly to my mind. I had thought of them occasionally in the intervening time, but now they rose before me as though they had second life. I heard his laugh, as he took my treasure and looked at my angry face. I heard his joking remark about his reason for looking at me. I heard the quick change in his voice when he

begged me to kiss him, as he might not be back 'just yet.' I saw him take his cap from the peg in the hall, while I stood watching him with the same angry expression. I heard the street-door slam behind him, and I saw him go down the street whistling, with his cap on one side, and his hands in his pockets. All the scene over again, vividly, as we acted it then. Where was he now? Alive, or dead? God knew. 'There is no hope,' I said, in my heart, 'no hope! He is drowned or dead with want. Heaven grant,' I cried aloud, with sudden bitterness, 'that it may be so, rather than, in his unnatural selfishness and rebellion, he should have broken and forgotten for ever the tender links that should chain him to the past, the sweet memories of his early years.'

As I rose from my knees, and closed my trunk, I resolved that this box should be parted with as well as its contents. It should not remain with me, torturing me whenever it met my gaze. It should go. I

slipped it in my pocket, and hurried downstairs into the street. The sweet, fresh evening air revived me. I walked on, calmly, with a new feeling of liberty and life, which soon chased away the sad thoughts which had at first filled my heart.

I directed my steps towards the shops which Mrs. Gray had mentioned to me, but soon, however, discovered there was not a jeweller's among them. I walked on farther in pursuit of what I wanted. After searching fruitlessly for some minutes—disliking to be out so late, for the lamps were already beginning to glimmer here and there, and the streets were partially deserted—I asked a passer-by for information, which was kindly given, and, after walking some distance farther, I found myself standing outside a large shop, that looked, with the gas and its resplendent treasures, one blaze of light.

I peeped in nervously. There were three men behind the counter: one making entries in a book, another putting away trays



of jewels, and the third walking up and down, doing nothing. The latter looked more pleasant than either of the others, and to him I at once determined to address myself; and yet I stood irresolute, unable to enter. Business was evidently over for the day, and there was no time for hesitation. As I stood, first looking at the jewels and then at their guardians, a tall boy produced himself from a side passage, and, after executing, as a preparatory incantation, a mad dance round me, with a howling accompaniment, and his eyes starting from their sockets, proceeded to put up the shutters, apparently in haste. This frightened me into action. In a moment I was in the shop, making my way towards the man whom I had selected as my friend. As I advanced, he stopped his walk, and looked at me enquiringly.

‘What can I show you, Miss?’

‘I want to know,’ I said, taking the little box from my pocket, and display-

ing the contents, 'whether you will buy these?'

Perhaps it was something in my way of speaking, for my voice trembled; perhaps something in the expression of my face, for I felt my colour rising with a kind of false shame of what I was doing, that caused him to answer me merely by looking first at my dress, and then in my eyes, with a most scrutinising expression in his own. He did not even glance a second time at my treasures till I spoke again.

'What will you give me for them?' I asked, in a bolder tone. 'They are good gold, and valuable stones.'

He recovered his equanimity in a moment, took the box from me, tilted the contents carelessly into his hand, and looked at them as carelessly. A sharp pain shot through me as I thought how cold the hands were which had touched them last.

Suddenly he started, changed colour, and uttered an exclamation of astonishment.

‘What’s the matter, Mr. Smith?’ said the man who was writing, without raising his head.

‘Why, look here, Sir,’ said the first speaker, going round in front of the counter, and, in so doing, putting himself between me and the door. ‘Look here, Sir. This—this young lady wants to know if we’ll buy this chain.’ He passed it, as he spoke, to the man who was writing.

He left off writing now, and put his pen behind his ear. As his eye caught the chain, he changed colour as the other had done, and, in lieu of speaking, came down the shop towards me. (Mr. Smith, meanwhile, I recollected afterwards, moved nearer the door.)

‘Where did you get this?’ he asked, shortly, looking at me as if he would read in my face the truth or untruth of my reply.

‘I have had it a long time,’ I said.

‘That’s no answer. Where did you get it?’

‘My father gave it to me.’

‘Where is he?’

‘He has been dead nearly four years.’

‘Where do you live?’

I began to feel indignant now, but, fearful of I knew not what, thought it best to answer.

‘I don’t know the name of the place,’ I said. ‘I left Victoria College this afternoon—it’s a ladies’ school—and the cabman drove me to a house where there was a room to let. I took the room, and have now come out to sell these things, as I have very little money left.’

‘A very probable story,’ said Mr. Smith, ‘but it requires confirmation.’

At this juncture the wretched shop-boy came in, and stood looking at me so much as if he had expected it all, and rather enjoyed it than otherwise, that my misery and anxiety were increased tenfold.

Mr. Smith’s companion took no notice of that gentleman’s remark, but again looked at

me, then at the chain, then once more at me.

‘ There’s something in your face,’ he said, slowly, ‘ which makes me think you are speaking the truth ; and, another thing is, it’s such a lame story to invent—if it is a story—being such an easy thing to run round to the College and test it. I believe also that had you come by the property dishonestly, you would never have been so imprudent as to bring it here, of all places in the world ; and, again —— What’s the matter ? ’

I felt cold and sick. I had only just begun to thoroughly realise what it all meant.

‘ There is nothing the matter.’

‘ You need not be alarmed,’ he went on, more gently. ‘ I see no ground for discrediting your statement, and certainly will try not to do so for a moment, if you answer me one question, as I trust you will answer it. Where did you live when your father gave you this ? ’

He held up the chain as he spoke.

‘At Eastbury, in Wiltshire,’ I said. ‘It was bought at a jeweller’s there of the name of Braddon.’

‘Quite right,’ he said; ‘that’s what I hoped you would say. Now, look here.’

He produced a kind of circular, stating, among other things to be received as facts, that John Braddon’s watches, chains, and jewels were superior to any in the world; and that, in addition to the head fountain of business at 13 College Street, C—— Town, he also possessed many smaller fountains, among others, one in North Street, Eastbury.

‘There’s the whole of the explanation to *me*,’ he said; ‘and the explanation to *you* is this.’

He put into my hand a long printed bill, headed ‘Robbery,’ which informed me that Mr. John Braddon’s premises, at No. 13 College Street, had been forcibly entered on the night of the 16th instant, and property carried off to the amount of 450*l*. A reward of 50*l*. was offered for the ‘apprehension of

the offender, or any one of the offenders ;' and I immediately concluded that my friend Mr. Smith, who was still guarding the door with praiseworthy perseverance, had, for some reason or other, imagined, and, to all appearance, was even now under the same delusion, that the 50*l.* was as good as safe in his pocket.

'Now, to be still clearer on the subject,' said Mr. John Braddon, for he I (I afterwards heard rightly) concluded the speaker to be—'To make matters quite clear to you, I must tell you that this chain you offer for sale is one of our patents—that is, you know, no one but ourselves may make a chain of this pattern, and that a dozen or so were among the property stolen on the 16th. Of course, therefore, on seeing this particular one, there was, for the moment, a slight suspicion, especially as it is a most expensive article (when new, I mean), and we manufacture but few like it, in comparison with others of inferior workmanship and quality.



Do you see? The suspicion was slight, very slight, but still it was natural for it to exist; though, had I examined your chain thoroughly at first, I should have seen at once what I now see, and that is that there is a slight difference in what we call the "catch" of it and that of those which were stolen from us last week.'

'Yes,' I said, my heart beating quickly at the thought of the danger I had escaped, and a fresh feeling of indignation coming over me as I again realised that the man to whom I was speaking had thought it possible, for some moments at least, that I was a thief—  
'Yes, I quite understand, I don't mind it at all. But will you buy it?'

I spoke eagerly, for I felt that if unsuccessful in disposing of it now, I should never, after such an adventure as this, have courage to enter another shop on the same errand. A prison, at least, would be the result next time.

'You are very anxious to sell it, are you not?'

‘Yes, very,’ I answered, unguardedly.  
‘I am in great need of money.’

‘What will you take for it?’

‘What will you give me? I do not know its worth at all.’

‘What do you say to 7*l.* for it?’

‘That will do,’ I exclaimed joyfully, for such an amount seemed a mine of wealth to me; and besides, I was ignorant that the chain originally cost nearly double that sum.  
‘That will do. And the earrings, and the ring, and box?’

‘The box is worth nothing, at least, to us, and as for these,’ examining the remaining contents as he spoke, ‘they are too old-fashioned for us to sell again as they are, so I can only buy them as old gold. Say half-a-sovereign for the lot——’

‘I won’t sell them then; only the chain.’

‘Very well, Miss. I should not give so much for that—it’s not the custom, you know, to give a high price for second-hand goods—only I knew your father slightly, in fact was

a patient of his. I'm right in supposing you to be Dr. Browne's daughter?'

'Yes,' I exclaimed, in surprise. 'How did you know me?'

'When you spoke of Eastbury, I remembered your face. I often saw you there a few years back.'

'I don't remember *you* at all.'

'Very likely, Miss. More people see us than we see.'

And with this original remark Mr. Braddon disappeared for a few moments and returned with seven sovereigns, which he dropped, one by one, into my hand, while I listened to the pleasant chink they made.

'There, Miss. I remember your father buying the chain quite well. He bought one for your mother at the same time. Have you got that too?'

'No,' I said, 'I have not. Good evening, Mr. Braddon.' I could bear it no longer.

'Good evening, Miss—I shall be happy to oblige you at any time.'

He opened the door, and I passed out, his last question ringing in my ears, and suggesting a thought which, strange as it may seem, had never before entered my mind. What had become of my mother's personal property? She must have had some; and this chain I knew she had, for she had worn it on the day I left her to go to the College. What had become of it? How singular that I had never thought of this before! I soon, however, dismissed the subject by coming to a conclusion which I have never had any reason for considering incorrect; and that was that my uncle was not the generous man that he appeared to so many to be, having appropriated the missing articles in part indemnification to himself for defraying my educational expenses.

I hurried along through the lighted streets, afraid to stop a moment, but almost too happy to experience the fear I certainly should have experienced had my mind been less excited; for I had never before been out at night

alone. It was a long time before Mrs. Gray's little cottage dawned upon my sight, for the road looked different to me now: the lamps were all lighted, and the shops being shut a great many of my way-marks had disappeared. However, it was at length reached safely, and the old lady answered my summons immediately, remarking gravely, 'that it was rather late for young people to be out shopping.'

'Yes,' I assented, 'but I could not find what I wanted as soon as I expected.'

Declining all offers of supper and assistance in unpacking, I wished my friend 'good-night' and hurried upstairs to my room, where the first thing I did was to lock up my new treasures and the remains of my old, thankful for my acquisition of the former, and repaid for the price they had cost me by the continued possession of the latter. My anxieties were for the present over; I was comparatively rich, and imagination painted the future in her own brilliant colours. Again

I saw the pleasant home in prospect—the gentle, obedient little pupils—the kind friends who were to respect and love me. All seemed prosperity and sunshine! And so I went to rest and slept calmly.

Surely, in every station of life, and at every age, our happy moments, even though few and short, more than counterbalance whatever darkness and despair precede them.

Better for me, I thought long afterwards, if that eventful day, with its hopes and fears, its dreams and fancies, had been blotted from my life for evermore!

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.





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